

NOVEMBER, 1958

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VOL. 32, NO. 11

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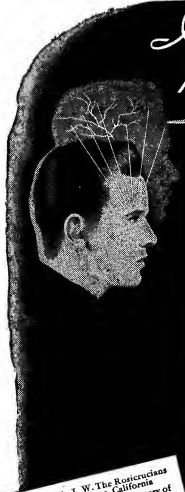


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INTRODUCING THE NEW EDITOR—

—of *Amazing Stories*. Next month there will be a new name on the masthead of the Old Aristocrat. Norman Lobsenz. In a sense, Norm doesn't need to be introduced. He's been one of us for a long time; an avid science fiction reader, Norm can talk science fiction authoritatively, naming writers, stories, and recounting s-f lore until way late in the morning. A fact writer of national prominence, Norm's by-line appears regularly in *Redbook*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and other top mags. His record as an editor is also impressive and he will bring to the Ziff-Davis Fiction Group a dynamic approach that will spark the book in coming months.

But more important, I think, Norm comes in with an affinity for *Amazing Stories* and with you readers that is deep and genuine—that springs from having *been* one of you for many years.

Personally, I have always felt that being the editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* is different from any other editorship in existence; this because no other magazines have as loyal and devoted a membership. Membership. Is that the wrong word? I think not. So far as I'm concerned I've always thought of you folks in that sense—as club members rather than magazine buyers. And I've sensed that same feeling in the letters you've written to me—in the sincere interest you've taken in the books.

It has been a rare privilege to get your letters and find therein such friendly inquiries as "What's Howard Browne doing these days? Or, "How is Ray Palmer getting along?" Or, "Fairman, when are you going to get off your dead weight and start writing again?"

Well, the answer to that last one is, right now, chum. So you'll be hearing from me plenty even though this is the last editorial that will be signed,—PWF

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...OR SO YOU SAY

Dear Editor:

I read your novel "Parapsyche" and some interesting possibilities occur to me:

Mr. Vance states that one's memory of himself is the most important factor in forming the spirit in the after-life. Does this mean that every lunatic that has called himself Napoleon will become Napoleon when he dies? Also, think of all the thousands of children who ardently believe in Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, etc. Are the real persons in the after-life like "Lew Wetzel"? Another problem, presumably any memory, no matter how faint is enough to form an image in the after-life. Since almost every insect gets a chance to mate, and therefore be remembered by at least one other insect, there must be a continuous locust plague in the after world.

Next, I would like to disagree with H. R. Frye who stated that science should not be in science fiction magazines. Certainly not everyday, run-of-the-mill science, but sensational science like Dr. Arthur Barron's "Body Bank." You should have written an article on Gibberelin when it first came out, its effects are straight from science fiction. The only way you can make up this oversight is to write a lengthy article on man's losing battle with the insects, future possible attacks and the insect's counter moves.

M. J. S.

Los Angeles, Calif.

● *We can't see how very many people can become Napoleon in the after-life. After all, Napoleon himself is there to protect his own interests.*

Dear Editor:

In my opinion, if you keep the monthly novel you will be the best magazine in the business. I do, however, have some gripes as far as the novels are concerned. Why aren't they longer? I have read three out of the six that you have published to date: "The Space Egg," "The Waters Under the Earth," and "Parapsyche." All of these seemed too short. The endings came up too fast and the plots were a little too simple. The only one of the three mentioned that has any chance of becoming a book is the second one, by Charles Eric Maine.

Another thing about the novels—I wish that you would stick to science fiction and not go off into some unclassifiable fantasy like you did in "Parapsyche."

(Continued on page 80)

Holly's scientist-father died and left her his love and the unfinished results of his genius—a bequest that proved to be a—

LEGACY OF TERROR

By HENRY SLESAR

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

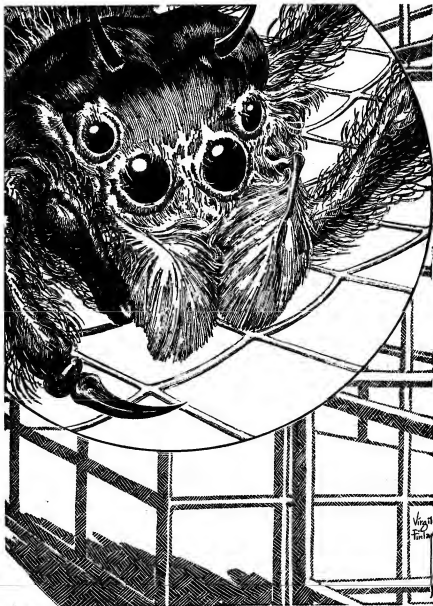
HOLLY KENDALL hated the embalmer for his art. She looked at the dead face of her father as he lay in his bier, and she wanted to reach over and gently prod his shoulder until he wakened and smiled at her.

Then, for the first time since she had learned the shocking news of his death, she broke down and cried.

It was almost three weeks later before she became accustomed to the idea of a world without Professor John Kendall's tall, stooped figure. It was only then that Price, her father's attorney, was able to make her sit still and



The pattern of the



future lay under the microscope.

listen to the dry, unemotional facts of her future.

"Now as to money," he said, clearing his throat. "I needn't tell you that your father wasn't a rich man. He swallowed up whatever annuities he had in his research, just as he swallowed up those university grants of his. The lawyer, a plump, sober man, looked mildly disapproving. "So I'm afraid you won't have more than your father's insurance money, which will be very little."

"Do you think I really care?" Holly whispered.

"No, no, of course not. I just wanted you to know the facts. However, there is a legacy of some kind, but I can't begin to appraise its value. I'd suggest you have some reputable—"

Holly glanced up. "What legacy?"

"His laboratory. The house and the laboratory he maintained in Vermont, including whatever furniture, fixtures, and equipment remaining from his experiments. I've already received some inquiries, both from the university and from private research organizations, and if you're interested, I'll arrange for them to contact you. Perhaps you might be able to make a favorable—"

"No," Holly said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I can't sell father's laboratory, Mr. Price, you know that. He spent more years of his life there than anywhere else."

The lawyer grunted. "If you have some idea, Miss Kendall, of maintaining a sort of shrine—"

"I don't know what my idea is. I—I've never even seen the place. Father never let me near it. Not even mother was allowed there; I suppose that was one of the reasons she left him eventually—"

"Yes," Mr. Price said vaguely. "But I assure you, Miss Kendall, there probably is no *intrinsic* value in the place. So if I were you . . ."

"You're not me, Mr. Price. I want to go there, see the place, perhaps live in it. Then I'll decide what's to be done with it."

He sighed. "Very well, Miss Kendall; you know your own mind."

He opened the top drawer of his desk and removed a small brown envelope. There were three keys inside, and he dropped them on the desk blotter.

"One of these keys is to the house," he said. "Another is to his laboratory. And the

third—" He scratched his chin. "I can't tell you for certain. In your father's will, he mentions a strongbox; I would presume this may open it. Perhaps you'll find some securities or even cash; indeed, I hope so."

"When—when can I go there?"

"You may take actual possession as soon as the will is probated. There'll be a formal reading on Thursday—"

"Couldn't I go now? Just to look around?"

Mr. Price shrugged. "If you want to."

Holly Kendall stood up, an unusually tall girl with a lithe body, and a face that would have been strikingly lovely except for a chin too determined.

"I'll go at once," she said, taking the keys and dropping them into her purse.

The trees along the Vermont roadway had been baked brown in an August hotter and stickier than most. At the wheel of her car, Holly Kendall felt stifled by the oppressive weather, despite the abbreviated shorts and light cotton sweater she wore. Her father's house, tucked deep into a hillside eighteen miles off the main highway, was accessible only through tortuous

side roads, and the wear and tear on the car and herself was considerable. Every now and then, she pulled onto the shoulder of the road, and simply waited until her strength returned.

The waiting made her think, and her thoughts were of her father.

It was surprising how much affection she felt for the old man, and how little she actually knew of him. As a child, she had seen him only sporadically; there was always some project which took him away from home, some scientific conference, some hush-hush experiment in his Vermont retreat. Her mother, now dead, had despaired of the life Professor Kendall led her, and divorced him when Holly was nine. He had tried to remain a father to her, but he was a scientist first. Yet his frequent absences made his infrequent visits all the sweeter; her heart grew fonder and fonder of the tall, gentle man with his soft voice and distant eyes.

And then, after a separation of over four years, the news had come. Professor John Kendall had been found dead in his own laboratory; the tired old body at last relieved from earthly suffering.

It was almost dusk by the

time Holly reached the last leg of her journey. Another three miles, through crude woodland paths barely wide enough for her auto, would bring her to the door of her father's home and laboratory.

She stopped the car in a shaded grove, resting before making the final effort. She was tired, thirsty, and drowsy in the heat. She shut her eyes, and let her hands slide off the wheel into her lap, leaning her head back on the car cushion.

She only half-heard the chirping noise in the woods, a sound like crickets. It was only when the sound magnified, and the thrashing began in the forest, that she remembered that crickets were nocturnal creatures.

She opened her eyes, and saw the brambles part before her.

The thing that emerged was too incredible a sight for her mind to encompass; she stared at it without comprehension, even without fear, until it came closer. Then, as the glossy black body, with its great glistening bulges and waving antennae, approached the car, she screamed in a crescendo of terror that made the creature halt. She had to force her unwilling muscles to respond to the demands of

her fear; she crashed out of the automobile and began to run on legs that wouldn't cooperate, away from the impossible horror that watched her flight with detached interest in its enormous protruding eyes. It was only when she had staggered off half a mile down the road that she realized what the thing had been. It was an ant—a monstrous, six-foot ant, a black nightmare that had somehow escaped into the waking world.

Sobbing, she stumbled along the dust-laden road in the fast-approaching twilight, praying for help to come. It came, but almost half an hour later, in the form of a distant vehicle.

She waved her arms frantically until the car stopped. It was a jeep, so battered that it might have been a war relic, and the driver was a young man in a khaki shirt. He was grinning impishly as he stopped; Holly's appearance had that effect on young men. But when he saw her face, and the obvious distress in her eyes, the grin faded.

"Something wrong?" he said. "You look scared—"

She gasped, and pointed back down the road.

"Over there—"

"Take it easy. Catch your breath and then tell me. Did your car break down?"

She shook her head.

"Well, what was it then?"

"Ant," she managed to say. "Horrible thing—came out of the woods—" She looked at his puzzled face, and realized how her words must sound. But instead of incredulity, his face showed instantaneous interest.

"Did you say *ant*? Climb in!"

"No!" She shrank from his arm, but he pulled her into the car. They started down the road, heading right back to the scene she had tried to escape. "I don't want to go back," Holly said. "Please—"

But the young man, his eyes intent, kept his foot on the accelerator until they were in sight of the grove, and her deserted auto. He braked sharply, and then reached into a cluttered back seat for a Winchester. Then he hopped out and walked slowly towards the car.

"Be careful!" Holly cried.

A moment later, he said: "Nothing here. Come on and have a look."

Nervously, Holly obeyed. The car was sitting in the grove, just where she had left it. There was no sign of anything more menacing than a

ladybug crawling across the seat cover.

"I *did* see it," she said defensively. "I swear I did. It was a giant ant, five or six feet tall. It was awful! He came out of the woods there—"

"I believe you," the young man said quietly.

She looked at him deliberately for the first time. He was taller than she was, and that was surprising. Holly was five-feet-eleven in her stocking feet, and accustomed to looking at the part in men's hair. He wasn't handsome, but you couldn't help being attracted to his wide, boyish grin, or being respectful to the steady, penetrating gaze of his deep brown eyes. He was tanned, and the grin he gave her flashed white against his skin.

"I do believe you," he said. "My name's Bryce Cooper; I've been looking for these big bugs for the past month. This is about as close as I came."

"You—you're looking for them?"

"That's right. I'm an associate professor at the university; English Lit's my racket, but I got me a degree in entymology, too. So when I picked up reports of king-sized spiders and stuff in the vicinity,

I thought I'd take a look for myself. I've been just about ready to quit, and call it hallucinations, until you came along." He looked down at her, and his eyes were brightly inquiring.

"You said *them*. You mean there are more than—than this ant?"

"Never heard about any ant. Some farmer over in Ridgefield claimed that a giant bumblebee attacked one of his fieldhands. The hand corroborated the story, but he's sort of a village idiot. Then some nice old lady found a spider the size of a breadbox in her attic. She hit it with a broom, and it got away. Couple of more stories like that have gone around; naturally, I had to get nosey."

"But where do they come from? What are they?"

He shrugged. "Don't ask me; I've never seen one of the jolly beasts. I'm glad *you* did, though; that sort of gives me hope. Now would you describe our ant friend for me?"

She did, to the best of her uneasy recollection. Then, in answer to his question, told him the reason for her trip.

"So you're John Kendall's daughter!" he said, more avidly interested than before.

"That's right."

"Your father was a great

man; I guess I don't have to tell you that. And he was a hell of a nice guy, too. I paid him a call, not too long ago."

"You saw my father?"

"Just for an hour or so. I stopped off at his house on my wandering search for our bug friends. He treated me real fine. It was a shock when I heard about—" He stopped.

"Yes," Holly said, turning away.

A moment later, Bryce Cooper touched her shoulder.

"Could I ask you something?"

"What?"

"Will you marry me?"

She turned to him, her eyes wide. "What was that?"

"Will you marry me? I'm twenty-nine, a bachelor, earn \$5,120 a year, have regular habits, like good music, books—"

"Is that supposed to be funny?" Holly said stiffly.

"No, I mean it. I think it's about time I got married, man in my position. You're not only pretty, but you must be smart, being Kendall's daughter. Sounds like a good combination to me." He grinned winningly. "We can sit around on long, cold nights, and read the Science Journal—"

Holly couldn't help smiling. "You've got me wrong; I

don't know a thing about science. I'm a script reader for a publishing company."

"I'll take the chance," Bryce said. "Maybe I can interest you in my bug collection—"

Holly shivered. "No, thank you. I don't want to see another bug for a long, long time. And as for marriage—I'll have to think that over." She climbed behind the wheel of her car, and then said, hesitantly: "Would you mind just following me for the next three miles? I don't think I can stand another encounter with that thing—"

Bryce grinned. "Lady, I'd follow you anywhere."

He hopped into his jeep, and trailed her down the winding, bumpy roads until they reached her destination.

Professor John Kendall's home wasn't visible until it loomed up suddenly out of the forest, and from the moment Holly saw its hot, corrugated steel roof, its rough stone siding and dirt-caked windows, she knew what her father's lawyer meant about "intrinsic" value. She got out of the car, not even aware of Bryce Cooper trailing behind her, and walked deliberately to the front door. The surrounding air was unnaturally silent,

ominously heavy. She took the keys from her purse.

The second one unlatched the door. She paused before opening it, and turned to the man at her heels.

"Would you come in with me? I'm sort of jumpy."

"Delighted," Bryce said gallantly.

They went in together, and Bryce found a lightswitch beside the doorway. He flicked it, but nothing happened.

"Main power switch is off," he said.

But there was enough sun filtering through the dusty windows to enable them to see that the house was as bare and uninviting as a miner's shack. The few pieces of furniture scattered about the naked wood floor were rudimentary. The bedroom contained nothing more than a wooden foot locker and a narrow cot. The kitchen equipment was rusted and filthy; there was a colony of ants domesticating in the sink. Holly yelped when she saw them, and almost fell into Bryce's arms. He didn't seem to mind.

"No Buckingham Palace," he said wryly. "Your father didn't go much for interior decoration."

"He was a scientist," Holly said, flushing. "What did he

care for fancy furniture?"

"But you're a lady," Bryce said delicately. "And maybe you care, just a little. You really plan to spend the night here?"

"Of course!"

She went through the kitchen, towards a blank metal door at the end of the hallway.

"This must be the entrance to his lab," she said.

Bryce rapped it with his palm. "Steel," he grunted. "Wonder what he needed a steel door for?"

"I'm sure he had good reasons."

"That's just what worries me."

She put the first key in the lock, and the door yielded. But her footsteps halted at the doorsill, and Bryce volunteered: "I'll go in first."

She tried not to appear grateful for his offer. The truth was, Holly was enjoying her sense of feminine helplessness; a girl her size didn't get that many chances.

Bryce strolled in, tried a lightswitch again, with no result.

"No light here either. But you can see enough."

She came into the room, and saw what was to be seen. It was a bare, white room, but

here the barrenness contributed to a look of sterile cleanliness. There was a workbench with odd mechanical and chemical paraphernalia, all in orderly arrangement. One side of the room was taken up by a steel cabinet with glass doors tall enough to admit a man taller than Bryce; the other side of the room contained empty wire cages of varying sizes.

"What was your father working on?" Bryce said wonderingly, peering about in bewilderment.

"I don't know. He never told me; perhaps he never told anyone."

She walked to the cabinet, and looked through the glass doors. There was nothing to see inside. Bryce came to her, and fiddled with a pair of handles at the side of the huge cabinet. The handles gave to his touch, and he uncovered a panel of dials and gauges.

"It's some kind of machine," he grunted.

"What kind?"

"Search me." He bent closer, but the room had grown too dark to allow a careful examination. "I better go find that main power switch; it'll be night in another half hour."

He went out the doorway again, but as Holly watched

his retreating figure, a sound at the laboratory window made them both whirl towards its source. The sight that met their eyes froze them into horrified immobility, and Holly Kendall produced her second ear-splitting shriek of the day. It was an angry insect almost a foot long, and its great, hulking striped body thudded against the window frames as if attempting to shatter the glass. She screamed again, and Bryce ran towards the window, in time for the gargantuan bee to buzz its frustration and disappear from their sight.

"Oh, my Lord!" Holly sobbed. "What *was* it, Bryce?"

"A bee, so help me. Biggest damn bee I ever saw in my life—"

She was in his arms by this time, her head against his chest, her body trembling. He patted her shoulder, and said: "Look, I'm going to try and track that baby down. It's about time I hauled one of those things in—"

"No!" She held on to him fiercely. "Don't leave me!"

"I'll be back in a minute—"

"Please, Bryce!"

He sighed. "Okay, Miss Kendall, if that's what you want. But you've just made

me miss the opportunity of a lifetime. Not that *this* is so bad." He grinned, and she moved away from him, discovering that she could still blush hotly. Then Bryce Cooper's mood changed. "Say, listen," he said. "You're not thinking what *I'm* thinking, are you?"

"What?"

"That these insects, and your father's lab—maybe they're connected?"

"It couldn't be! My father was a chemist, and a physicist. He couldn't have anything to do with them."

"What makes you so sure? He might have been working with endocrinology or something. How about those empty cages? They could have held anything. Maybe even our bee—"

"That's ridiculous!"

"Why?"

"I—I don't know." She looked at her hand. She still held the key ring in her fingers.

"What's the third key for?" Bryce said shrewdly.

"A strongbox. There was supposed to be a strongbox somewhere in the lab, and this is the key for it."

"Let's have a look. Maybe there's a clue in it."

Their search didn't last

long. On the table, beside a rack of test tubes, there was a small green-metal box.

Holly tried the key, and it opened. She lifted the cover carefully.

"It's a book," she said, disappointed.

But Bryce seemed excited. "No, it's not. It's a journal; maybe a record of your father's work. That could tell us what this is all about." He picked it up, but the girl snatched it from his grasp in one quick movement.

"It'll tell *me*," she said firmly. "I don't remember inviting you to read it."

"I only thought—"

"You thought wrong. If this is a record of my father's work, then it's strictly private."

Bryce Cooper frowned. "Okay, if that's how you want it. Then I guess here's where I bow out." He started for the door, but Holly's hand detained him.

"No, wait," she said shyly. "I didn't mean for you to go."

"Sorry. Ought to be pretty boring around here now, with you nosing around that book. I'll be on my way."

"But I'm frightened. All those horrible insects around the place—"

"Courage, Holly," he said, patting her hand.

"Oh, all right! We'll *both* read it, if you insist."

Bryce looked happy. "Swell. So tell you what I'll do in return. Suppose I take my stuff out of the jeep, including my trusty Winchester, and we play house for a while? We can build ourselves a fire in that fireplace in the living room, if the chimney's working. And I've got some groceries in back that may be enough to make a decent meal. Okay?"

"Okay," Holly whispered.

He went outside; a few minutes later, the lights went on in the room as he located the main power switch.

An hour later, they turned to the first page of Dr. John Kendall's journal.

June 24. Today I embark on an exploration into a mystery greater than the atom, and perhaps more devastating in its consequence.

It is a journey into a realm few have traveled; indeed, few believe the realm actually exists. But if my premises are correct, and if my experiments are conclusive, then I will have unlocked a door to a secret that will alter the course of human thought and destiny as no prior discovery has done. I seek to define the material boundaries of the

human spirit; I seek a scientific basis for the soul.

My colleagues will argue my choice of words; I can foresee their bickering now. They will claim that I have overstepped the province of science, and am trespassing in a domain which rightfully belongs to religion. But whether "soul" is the definition for the mysterious essence I am exploring is merely a question of semantics. For my purposes, and the purposes of this journal, I shall use the word without apology. For when I conducted my first transmigration experiment at the university, and successfully transplanted the behavior, instincts, and personality of a common housefly into the body of a beetle—what else was it that made the journey from one organism to another, if not a "soul"?

But now I am prepared for larger, and more conclusive experiments. Now I have the experience, the equipment with which to test my findings to the nth degree, to a point where I may offer the world unshakable proof of their validity. It will be demonstrated for all to see.

Tomorrow, I begin my work. I have prepared the hamster for his voyage into the body of a fat, placid spi-

der who awaits his fate innocently in the wire cage.

June 25. I am overwhelmed; not by the ability which I have displayed in my laboratory today, but by the great natural forces which underlie the success of my experiment. The equipment operated without fault; within less than an hour, the hamster lay lifeless on the floor of the transmigration apparatus, in a state that must, by all scientific precedent, be called death. But is it really dead? This answer I do not know.

As for the spider, it is very much alive. It emerged from the coma-like state which the process induces and began to move frantically inside its steel prison. It is obvious that its movements are no longer that of its species. Its struggles to batter its way out of the cage, its inability to climb, indicate that the transference has indeed been made.

A few minutes ago, before retiring, I looked in on my transformed spider once more, and detected a phenomenon which troubles me. I am not sure of my ability to judge, but it seems to have enlarged in size. Will this be a side-effect of the process, as I once feared. Will there be physical as well as psychologi-

cal changes in the creatures possessed? I must watch my spider carefully.

June 28. There can no longer be any doubt: the spider is twice its normal size now, and the period of growth does not seem to have ended. How large will it become? Will it emerge a grotesque monster which will have to be destroyed for reasons of common safety? Or will it approximate the size of the hamster, whose soul now occupies its body?

I have been working steadily with the hamster these past two days, making attempts at resuscitation. All my efforts have failed; I begin to detect signs of decay in the body. There seems to be no choice but to believe that when the soul goes, the body must follow—just as the reverse is true in life.

Tomorrow, I will conclude my series of chemical experiments with the hamster; if they fail, I will make no further attempts to bring it back to life. Later, after I have satisfied myself that the process is failure-proof, I will attempt to reverse the transmigration procedure, attempt to return the soul of these creatures to their original bodies.

But there is still another

great mystery to which I seek the key. What became of the soul of the spider, when its body was occupied by the invading hamster? What effect was created upon the possessed? Is it sharing its body and its personality, side-by-side with the hamster? Has it lost its own identity and instincts? Is there a war raging inside the spider's body, a war for control? I am tantalized and baffled by this puzzle; perhaps future work will reveal the clue.

July 2. A calamity! The spider has escaped its cage. I wouldn't have believed it capable of the strength. When I discovered the mangled, twisted bars this morning, I was nearly hysterical, both with disappointment at my loss and with fear that my experiments might draw undue attention from a suddenly terrorized community. Not that the spider would knowingly harm anyone—I have fed it from my own hand, lettuce and other vegetables, better suited to the diet of the hamster who now lies dead and buried in the woods. It's as gentle as the hamster, but the very sight of its grotesque body will be enough to rouse the countryside. But what can I do? I cannot stop now

to conduct a long search for the creature; I am preparing for the new experiment in the morning. I must only wait, and pray, and be thankful if the poor beast wandered off to die unseen in some ditch or gully.

I must continue my glandular studies; there must be some way to prevent the uncharacteristic growth which seems to take place once soul-transference is made. There is danger in this growth. Every creature's size is determined by the nature of its physique; even though the spider's body appeared to have altered somewhat in weight distribution, it cannot survive this exorbitant growth without gravity taking its toll, without dying of its own insupportable weight. Or are the changes which take place enough to sustain its life? There is so much to be answered!

July 5. A woman in the town of Ridgefield has reported my spider. I can be grateful that her age and reputation for senility prevented widespread belief in her story. She located the creature in her attic, weaving a gigantic web, thick as rope; or at least, this was her story. She attacked it with a

broom, and it climbed from the dormer window and disappeared into the woods surrounding the house. Her tale has interested some of the younger men of the town, and there has been talk of calling the city newspapers. But I can see that I have no real need for concern, not unless the beast makes another and more public appearance.

Yet I am disturbed by the details of her account presuming it was accurate. If the spider is climbing, and spinning its web, then its actions are no longer hamster-like, then the spider "soul" is once more dominant.

Will I ever know what truly happens as a result of this transference? Or am I merely a conjuror, making genies appear by rubbing a lamp, a lamp whose inner mechanism will never be revealed to me?

This morning's experiment appears to be completely successful. The cat lies dead in its cage; I will not even attempt to revivify it. But the bumblebee is alive and thriving, and already seems to have lost the knowledge that it can fly.

July 6. I am tired. My futile attempts to reverse the transmigration process has wearied me; I have worked

for fourteen hours with no tangible result. I am forced to conclude that this is a one-way process, resulting in death to the body of the organism whose soul is transferred to another. It lives on, of course, but sharing the body of its host. Here is where the real core of the secret lies, in learning what becomes of the soul after its entry, in determining the fate of the host's own soul. This is a mystery I must unravel, or I have only scratched the surface of my exploration, only performed an astonishing trick for the amusement of the public and the scientific world. I must learn the answer!

This afternoon, a report reached me that my giant spider had been seen again, this time climbing into a sewerage drain. The hamster would not have sought this kind of refuge; has its soul departed, leaving only its size as a reminder of its presence?

July 8. The monstrous bumblebee crashed from its cage this morning and attacked me, literally attacked me! I am more astonished than hurt, more frightened by the significance of the act than by the personal shock it

gave me. The bee is now the size of the cat whose soul occupied it, but it has regained its knowledge of flight. Yet the cat was a gentle creature; it would never have demonstrated such violence and belligerency. The bee itself is not an aggressive insect, unless thwarted. Perhaps that is why it attacked me; perhaps the bee-soul has dominated once more. I am bewildered and confused, and suddenly helpless at the consequences of my own work. I can no longer fathom the behavior of the creatures I have created; I don't know what happens to them once the transmigration process is made. Does the conflict inside the shared body create savagery, violence? Is it a totally *new* kind of creature that emerges from the amalgam? Will I ever know? Can I ever know?

Later. I have been dozing, and the answer came to me as if from a dream. Of course, there is only one way to learn the truth. I must make the transmigration journey myself . . .

Here the journal ended.

Holly closed the book and stared dumbly at the tight-lipped young man in the wooden chair by the fireplace. She felt numb.

"Oh, my God," she said quietly, flatly.

"So that's how it happened," Bryce Cooper said. "He must have been conducting the final experiment when his heart gave out. Or maybe the shock of the transmigration itself was too much for him . . ."

The girl was shaking her head, unable to speak.

"Take it easy," Bryce said solicitously. "You've got to be sensible about this."

"He's not dead," Holly Kendall said.

"What?"

"Don't you see? My father's not dead."

"Now, look. Don't go getting any wild ideas because of what that book says. Didn't you see your father before they—" He paused. "Well, didn't you go to the funeral? You knew he was dead."

"Yes. But maybe they buried just his body—maybe his soul—"

Bryce stood up and began pacing the floor, the old, rotting boards creaking beneath his heavy feet.

"I wouldn't go off on the deep end about this," he said. "I know that journal makes his death sound suspicious, but you don't have any evidence. Wouldn't he have made an entry in the book about an

experiment involving himself?"

"I—I guess he would," Holly admitted.

"Sure, he would. But he didn't. That sounds to me like he didn't get to his experiment before his death." He took the journal from her limp hands and flipped to the last entry. "The last date he gives is July 8. Now—what was the date of his death?"

"I'm not sure. They found his body on the fourteenth of July, but they weren't sure when he had died, exactly."

She had grown increasingly paler as the reading of the journal had progressed; now Holly looked ghost-like in the flickering light of the log fire.

"Well, it just doesn't make sense to think what you're thinking, Holly. For one thing, he would have made copious notes about any experiment in which he was the chief participant; any scientist would do that much. Secondly, if he had actually occupied the body of some—some animal—then he would have come forward by now, to show himself." Bryce ran his fingers wildly through his hair. "This is all so crazy. I can't really believe that he did all this—"

Holly whirled on him. "You think my father was a liar?"

"No, no, I didn't say that! But it's so hard to get used to the idea—"

"But you saw the bee for yourself—that awful bee! And then there was the ant—" Her eyes widened, and she put her hands to her throat. "The ant," she said again. "He doesn't mention the ant. It might have been—might have—oh, no! Oh, Lord, no!"

"Holly!"

She was on her feet, swaying, her eyes focused nowhere.

"The ant," she said, in a deathly monotone. "Six feet tall . . . like father . . ."

"Don't talk like that!"

"*Father!*" Holly Kendall screamed, and then began a wild laugh that ended in a paroxysm of hysteria, a spell that wasn't broken until Bryce Cooper hurried to her side and slapped her hard across the cheek. Then she looked at him, her mouth pouting, and her eyes rolled back into her head, leaving only whiteness. Her body melted into his arms, and consciousness left her.

When she awoke, it was morning.

She looked about the empty room, at the cold ashes in the fireplace, at the bright glare

of daylight framed in the windows. When she realized that Bryce Cooper was no longer there, she fought the return of panic.

Ten minutes later, the sound of an auto engine rumbling to a halt brought her to the door. She opened it, and saw Bryce climbing out of the jeep. He took a crate from the back of the car, and grinning, carried it to the doorstep.

"Morning!" he said cheerfully. "Thought I'd get us some breakfast, while you had your beauty sleep. Found a farmhouse down the road; freshest eggs you ever saw, had to practically fight the chickens for 'em."

"What — what happened last night?" Holly said.

"Well, it was pretty compromising," Bryce frowned, his eyes laughing. "Darn good thing we're engaged to be married; you know how people talk."

"Where did you sleep?"

"On the floor, of course. Be darned lucky if the termites didn't get into my head. Now lookout, gal, let's get these vittles on the stove."

After breakfast, shyly, Holly renewed the conversation of the night before. Bryce answered her fearful questions calmly, reassuringly.

"Now that's just plain sil-

ly," he said, chomping toast. "The last thing your father would do would be to use an ant for his experiment. He was a scientist, remember? He wouldn't take such a ridiculous chance. If you ask me, he never *did* go through with it. And if I were you, that's what I'd believe until I knew different."

"I guess you're right," Holly said, watching him eat. "The whole thing seems silly now . . . in broad daylight."

"Sure it is." He waved his fork at her. "Say, I've got an idea for you. Going to the farmhouse, I passed the purtiest little babbling brook and hilltop you ever saw. Right off a bank calendar, so help me. How about you and me taking a little trip there?"

Holly hesitated.

Then: "All right, Bryce. I'd like that."

She did like it. The brook was barely more than a moist, crooked ditch, and the unspoiled hilltop was the hiding place of a wasp city. But they wandered about the sun-splashed countryside, feeling the comforting warmth of the bright, clear morning, and sensing the essential innocence of nature. For a moment, Holly discovered that she could still laugh and feel

happy; when they sat beneath the sheltering branches of a huge oak tree, she discovered that young Bryce Cooper was good to look at and talk to and be with.

They sat there for almost two hours, and then Bryce moved closer and put one arm about her shoulders. She didn't resist, so he became bolder.

He kissed her. When they parted, he murmured: "Good little Hollyhocks . . ."

For a moment, she didn't react to the strange words that dropped from his lips. She knew there was a vague memory somehow connected with what he said, but the memory was as fleeting as the light clouds floating by overhead.

They walked back to the car, and she remembered.

"Hollyhocks . . ." she whispered.

"What's that?"

"I—I was called that once. By my father, when I was a little girl."

"Name suits you," he chuckled. "Mind if I call you that too—sometimes?" He tried to kiss her again, but she pulled away from him. "Hey, what's the matter? My charm wear off already?"

"It's not that. I—I'm just tired."

"Think you better start making plans. I don't know if you should spend much more time in that place. What with all those screwy bugs around here—"

"I'll see," Holly said. "But I want to go back now, Bryce. Please."

At her father's house, Holly and Bryce Cooper made another inspection of the premises, searching for further clues to the incredible experiments which had taken place inside the strange steel machine against the laboratory wall. There was nothing else: no more papers, or notes, or data of any kind.

"It's no use," Holly sighed. "I'll have to turn over the journal to the university, or to some of father's colleagues. They'll know best what to do about all this."

"Good idea," Bryce said. "No use getting more involved then you have to. Besides, I want to see what happens when they hear about *this* little research project. Ought to be plenty of fireworks."

"Let's go, Bryce," Holly said, heading for the door of the laboratory.

They went back into the main room, and saw the head of a giant ant in the front window.

Holly made a sound that might have been an aborted scream. Bryce pushed her behind him rudely, saying: "Back into the lab. He may not have seen us—"

The head of the creature was gone from the window.

"Oh, Bryce," Holly whispered.

"It's all right. I don't think he means any harm. And if he does—" He looked into the room, where his Winchester stood propped against the mantle of the fireplace, close enough if needed.

They waited another long minute.

"He might have left for good," the man said.

Holly trembled against him.

Then the door of the house exploded open, torn from its very hinges, landing with a crash against the floorboards!

Holly screamed, full-throated, reckless with fear, as the enormous glossy body stood silhouetted in the doorway, its great bulging eyes examining them, its antennae waving curiously. Bryce shouted something, and then plunged straight for the creature, waving his arms. When it didn't react, he veered sharply towards the fireplace, and scooped up the rifle in his hand. He fell to his knees and

cocked it in a lightning motion.

The giant ant took a step forward, and to the accompaniment of Holly Kendall's strangled gasp of horror, the rifle cracked loudly and sent a bullet into the creature's bulky torso. It continued to advance, and another shot struck the head, bringing a spurt of blood. The third shot halted it, and the ant collapsed in a strange dance of slow-motion death. It fell to the floor and lay silent.

The tableau remained fixed until Bryce Cooper got to his feet and approached the body. He recoiled when the reek of the dead creature seemed to hit his nostrils; then he turned to look at Holly.

She was staring at him, staring at the smoking weapon in his hand.

"What have you done?" she said.

"Huh?"

"What did you do?" Holly said, in a rising inflection. "Why did you kill him?"

"Are you serious?"

"It—it might have been—" She put her hand to her cheek and swayed; she would have fallen if Bryce didn't reach her side in time to support her. "Let go of me," she said faintly. "Let go of me . . . you murderer . . ."

"Holly, snap out of it!"

"You killed him," she said dreamily. "You killed my father . . ."

"It's not your father!" he said angrily. "It's some poor tragic creation, that's all it is. Get that crazy idea out of your head . . ."

"Oh, Bryce!"

She began to cry, in a child-like wail that ended in deep, heaving sobs against his chest. He held her that way until the tears subsided; then he led her gently toward the bedroom of her father's house.

"You lie down and take it easy," he said. "I'll get rid of that—that thing in the living room. Then, after you feel better, we'll get started."

"All right," Holly said weakly, collapsing on the cot.

She closed her eyes, and found the darkness comforting. After a while, the light came, like sun behind clouds, and she saw her mother in a long blue gown. Her mother's voice was faint and almost indiscernible, but she knew that she spoke words of love. Shortly after, she saw the tall, stooped figure of her father approach her mother's side, and he kissed her gently on the cheek. Holly felt a surge of sudden happiness as she witnessed the scene; she

wanted to run towards them and be a part of their tender moment. She tried, but her legs wouldn't make the journey. "Father," she called. "Father, come get me." He smiled, and approached her. But as he approached, his figure wavered oddly, blurring in the peculiar light that was flooding her dream, becoming black and glossy and strangely configured. Then she knew that it was no longer her father, but a dreadful thing with bulging eyes and waving antennae. She wanted to cry out, but her throat was stopped. She struggled to speak, to move, but nothing happened. With a final desperate effort, she forced herself out of the darkness and into the light, the real light of her dead father's house. She opened her eyes with a start.

"Hollyhocks," he said.

"Father! Why didn't you come and get me?" she asked.

"I don't understand you, Hollyhocks."

She turned to look at his face, but didn't see it. Instead, she saw Bryce Cooper bending over her.

"Bryce—"

"What is it, dear? Did I frighten you? I know it's strange for you, seeing me like this. But I had to do it, you understand that. You

read my journal; you know what a problem I faced."

"Bryce, what are you talking about?"

He laughed. "It was really terribly convenient; I don't know when providence dealt more kindly with me. Not two days after I decided that self-experimentation was the only answer, this young man came wandering by . . ."

She sat up, her eyes round with bewilderment. "I don't understand. What's happened to you? What are you saying?"

"Let me finish, Hollyhocks, you shouldn't interrupt Daddy this way. But then, you always were an impetuous child." He smiled, and touched her hand. His skin was cold. "Anyway, it was a lucky circumstance for me. The young man was an associate professor from the university, on summer leave. He heard about my giant insects, and was investigating the vicinity. Naturally, I invited him in, and we talked. It was most interesting; he knew a great deal about entymology; I myself knew very little."

She tried to rise, but his hand held her firmly pinned to the cot.

"After we talked for a while, I offered him a drink.

It was the simplest thing in the world to make his drink especially potent, potent enough to induce a deep and lasting sleep that would permit me to conclude my experiment in the only manner possible—with myself as subject. I had to *know*, darling, don't you see that? I had to know what happened when this transmigration took place, I had to learn for myself what occurred in both consciousnesses.

"I chose another human, of course; that was the only sensible path. My own body would be dead, deserted, useless; but I would be occupying a new body, and a body with human intelligence. Together we could lift the veil on the secret. I chose Mr. Cooper; or more exactly, Mr. Cooper chose me." He laughed again, more loudly, in a voice like her father's, yet strangely distorted.

"No," Holly whispered. "NO, it can't be . . ."

"The experiment was a total success. The equipment operated automatically and without failure. Within an hour, I was looking at my own dead body in the cabinet, and flexing the muscles of a stranger. I found myself in complete possession—there was no hint that Bryce Cooper

had ever occupied the body that was now mine. I felt that the evacuation of his soul had been complete; that I was fully master.

"But I was wrong," he said sadly. "I know now that I was merely sharing, and that the soul of Bryce Cooper was struggling to reassert itself all the time. I fought it, fought hard, but at last was unable to resist. I gave in, Hollyhocks. It was no worse than falling asleep. Not like death, not at all; because I knew that I would awake again, awake and take control. And perhaps next time, I would not be toppled from my throne again . . ."

He was stroking her hair, as if she were a child.

"You're not my father," Holly whispered. "You're mad. You're not Daddy . . ."

"But of course I am, baby. You know that. I'm John Kendall." He chuckled, but without humor. "John Kendall, chemist, physicist, professor, father, scientist—John Kendall, the immortal . . ."

For the first time, she saw the unholy glitter of his eyes.

"You're mad," Holly said, the world spinning.

"Mad? An interesting conclusion, Hollyhocks. I can't

argue with you, darling, I'm in no mood. I'm too happy now, too filled with joy at the prospects ahead. Can't you see them, Hollyhocks? Life eternal . . . soul to soul . . . an endless chain of years lying before me like a great highway . . ."

His grip lightened on her hand, and Holly sprang from the cot and ran to the door of the bedroom, out into the main room, heading for the sanity of the sunlight, screaming . . .

"Holly! Hollyhocks! Come back!"

She shut her ears to the sound of his cries, and stumbled, sobbing, towards the autos waiting in the road. Her hand wrestled with the handle of her own car, but it resisted. Behind her, she heard the running footsteps of the tall man who was neither lover nor father nor . . .

"I said *Stop!*" the man cried.

She turned, and saw the rifle in his hands.

"Don't make me do it, darling," he said. "Don't make me do it, Hollyhocks . . ."

She stared at him, shaking her head.

"I can't help it, surely you must see that. I don't want this story told, baby, you can see how important it is to me.

So come back to Daddy, Hollyhocks . . . come to Daddy . . ."

Slowly, cautiously, he approached.

"No!" Holly shouted, and yanked at the door handle until it yielded. The first shot from the rifle spanged against the fender.

"I'm sorry, baby, I'm really sorry," the man said, in her father's gentle voice.

Then he raised the rifle, and aimed carefully at her head.

They might have both heard the buzzing noise overhead, if their attention hadn't been so fixed upon their personal drama. It was the man who became aware of it first, and he jerked his head skywards to find its source. When he saw the gargantuan bee, with its enormous wing-spread and bulging striped body, a small smile flitted across his face. But when the insect buzzed angrily and dived towards him, his expression changed and he lifted the rifle to fire an inaccurate shot in the air. For a moment, the bee was diverted; then it attacked again. Before he could raise the weapon, it was upon him. From its tail, the giant sting struck like a sword into his chest; he screamed more in

fury than pain, and batted at the huge striped body with the butt end of the gun. The bee's gleaming, translucent wings went suddenly limp, and it crashed to the ground at his feet.

Holly watched the face of Bryce Cooper grow crimson, and then white, as the pain filled his body. She saw Bryce Cooper's hands clutching his chest, trying to pull the barb from his flesh. Then, with a cry of anger and hatred, he staggered forward and fell to the rough earth . . .

Father Danielson, grave of eye, but with a small, twisted smile on his face, folded his hands on his lap and looked across his study at the girl by the fireplace.

"So what is it you want me to tell you?" he asked in a quiet comforting manner.

"I—I wanted your advice, Father Danielson. I really didn't know where else to turn. I couldn't bring myself to turn my father's journal over to the university, until I felt sure I knew what I was doing."

"I see." The minister rubbed his chin. "You think because your father was investigating the human soul; that you needed the viewpoint of religion?"

Holly flushed. "I suppose so."

"And what did you expect me to say? That the soul should remain forever a mystery, God's mystery? That he should never have tampered with it, and that the fate he suffered was punishment?"

"It's what I think myself, Father," Holly said. She took the journal from her purse. "That's why I wanted you to tell me I was right—to destroy *this*."

She threw the book on the fire.

Father Danielson watched the flames scorch the cover for a moment, and then got up and retrieved Professor John Kendall's journal.

"You underestimate us," he said gently. "Do you think we have anything to fear from science? No, Holly; your way is wrong. Knowledge leads to understanding; we think understanding leads to God." He handed her the book. "Take this to your father's friends and colleagues, and tell them what you know. Let them carry on his work; let them explore the mystery until they find its key. God will bless them in their search for truth."

He walked her to the door, and she left. The sun was shining.

THE END

WORLD BEYOND PLUTO

A "Johnny Mayhem" Adventure

By C. H. THAMES

ILLUSTRATOR NOVICK

Johnny Mayhem, one of the most popular series characters ever to appear in AMAZING, has been absent too long. So here's good news for Mayhem fans; another great adventure of the Man of Many Bodies.

THEY loaded the over-age spaceship at night because Triton's one spaceport was too busy with the oreships from Neptune during the day to handle it.

"Symphonies!" Pitchblend Hardesty groaned. Pitchblend Hardesty was the stevedore foreman and he had supervised upwards of a thousand loadings on Triton's crowded blastways, everything from the standard mining equipment to the innards of a new tavern for Triton City's so-called Street of Sin to special anti-riot weapons for the Interstellar Penitentiary not 54 miles from Triton City, but never a symphony orchestra. And most assuredly never, never an all-girl symphony orchestra.

"Symphonies!" Pitchblend Hardesty groaned again as several stevedores came out on the

blastway lugging a harp, a base fiddle and a kettle drum.

"Come off it, Pitchblend," one of the stevedores said with a grin. "I didn't see you staying away from the music hall."

That was true enough, Pitchblend Hardesty had to admit. He was a small, wiry man with amazing strength in his slim body and the lore of a solar system which had been bypassed by thirtieth century civilization for the lures of interstellar exploration in his brain. While the symphony—the all-girl symphony—had been playing its engagement at Triton's make-shift music hall, Hardesty had visited the place three times.

"Well, it wasn't the music, sure as heck," he told his critic now. "Who ever saw a hundred girls in one place at one time on Triton?"



Mayhem was blocked. The gun was useless.

The stevedore rolled his eyes and offered Pitchblend a suggestive whistle. Hardesty booted him in the rump, and the stevedore had all he could do to stop from falling into the kettle drum.

Just then a loud bell set up a lonely tolling and Pitchblend Hardesty exclaimed: "Prison break!"

The bell could be heard all over the two-hundred square miles of inhabitable Triton, under the glassite dome which enclosed the small city, the spaceport, the immigration station for nearby Neptune and the Interstellar Penitentiary. The bell hadn't tolled for ten years; the last time it had tolled, Pitchblend Hardesty had been a newcomer on Neptune's big moon. That wasn't surprising, for Interstellar Penitentiary was as close to escape-proof as a prison could be.

"All right, all right," Pitchblend snapped. "Hurry up and get her loaded."

"What's the rush?" one of the stevedores asked. "The gals ain't even arrived from the hotel yet."

"I'll tell you what the rush is," Pitchblend declared as the bell tolled again. "If you were an escaped prisoner on Triton, just where would you head?"

"Why, I don't know for sure, Pitchblend."

"Then I'll tell you where. You'd head for the spaceport, fast as your legs could carry

you. You'd head for an outgoing spaceship, because it would be your only hope. And how many outgoing spaceships are there tonight?"

"Why, just two or three."

"Because all our business is in the daytime. So if the convict was smart enough to get out, he'll be smart enough to come here."

"We got no weapons," the stevedore said. "We ain't even got a pea-shooter."

"Weapons on Triton? You kidding? A frontier moon like this, the place would be blasted apart every night. Interstelpen couldn't hold all the disturbers of the peace if we had us some guns."

"But the convict—"

"Yeah," Pitchblend said grimly. "He'll be armed, all right."

Pitchblend rushed back to the manifest shed as the bell tolled a third time. He got on the phone and called the desk of the Hotel Triton.

"Hardesty over at the spaceport," he said. "Loading foreman."

"Loading foreman?" The mild, antiseptic voice at the other end of the connection said it as you would say talking dinosaur.

"Yeah, loading foreman. At night I'm in charge here. Listen, you the manager?"

"The manager—" haughtily—"is asleep. I am the night clerk."

"O.K., then. You tell those hundred girls of yours to hurry. Don't scare them, but have you

heard about the prison break?"

"Heard about it? It's all I've been hearing. They—they want to stay and see what happens."

"Don't let 'em!" roared Pitchblend. "Use any excuse you have to. Tell 'em we got centrifugal-upigal and perihelion-peritonitus over here at the spaceport, or any darn thing. Tell 'em if they want to blast off tonight, they'll have to get down here quick. You got it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then do it." Pitchblend hung up.

The escape bell tolled a fourth time.

His name was House Bartock, he had killed two guards in his escape, and he was as desperate as a man could be. He had been sentenced to Interstelpen for killing a man on Mars in this enlightened age when capital punishment had been abolished. Recapture thus wouldn't mean death, but the prison authorities at Interstelpen could make their own interpretations of what life-in-prison meant. If House Bartock allowed himself to be retaken, he would probably spend the remaining years of his life in solitary confinement.

He walked quickly now, but he did not run. He had had an impulse to run when the first escape bell had tolled, but that would have been foolish. Already he was on the outskirts of Triton City because they had not discovered his escape for two precious hours. He could hole up

in the city, lose himself somewhere. But that would only be temporary.

They would find him eventually.

Or, he could make his way to the spaceport. He had money in his pocket—the dead guard's. He had a guardsman's uniform on, but stripped of its insignia it looked like the jumper and top-boots of any spaceman. He had false identification papers, if needed, which he had worked on for two years in the prison printshop where the prison newspaper was published. He had . . .

Suddenly he flattened himself on the ground to one side of the road, hugging the gravel and hardly daring to breathe. He'd heard a vehicle coming from the direction of Interstelpen. It roared up, making the ground vibrate; its lights flashed; it streaked by trailing a jet of fire.

House Bartock didn't move until the afterglow had faded. Then he got up and walked steadily along the road which led from Interstelpen to Triton City.

"Girls! Hurry with your packing! Girls!"

Sighing, Matilda Moriarity subsided. The girls, obviously, were in no hurry. That would have been out of character.

Matilda Moriarity sighed again. She was short, stocky, fifty-two years old and the widow of a fabulously wealthy interstellar investment broker.

She had a passion for classical music and, now that her husband had been dead three years, she had decided to exercise that passion. But for Matilda Moriarity, a very out-going fifty-two, exercising it had meant passing it on. The outworlds, Matilda had told her friends, lacked culture. The highest form of culture, for Matilda, was classical music. Very well. She would bring culture to the outworlds.

Triton was her first try and even now sometimes she had to pinch herself so she'd know the initial attempt had been a smashing success. She didn't delude herself completely. It had been a brainstorm selecting only girls—and pretty young things, at that—for the Interstellar Symphony. On a world like Triton, a world which played host to very few women and then usually to the hard types who turned up on any frontier in any century, a symphony of a hundred pretty girls was bound to be a success.

But the music, Matilda Moriarity told herself. They had listened to the music. If they wanted to see the girls in their latest Earth-style evening gowns, they had to listen to the music. And they had listened quietly, earnestly, apparently enjoying it. The symphony had remained on Triton longer than planned, playing every night to a full house. Matilda had had the devil's own time chaperoning her girls, but that was to be ex-

pected. It was their first taste of the outworlds; it was the outworlds' first taste of them. The widow Moriarity had had her hands full, all right. But secretly, she had enjoyed every minute of it.

"They say the bell means a prison break!" First Violin squealed excitedly. First Violin was twenty-two, an Earth girl named Jane Cummings and a student at the conservatory on Sirtus Major on Mars, but to the widow Moriarity she was, and would remain, First Violin. That way, calling the girls after their instruments, the widow Moriarity could convince herself that her symphonic music had been of prime importance on Triton, and her lovely young charges of secondary importance.

"How many times do I have to tell you to hurry?"

"But these gowns—"

"Will need a pressing when you return to Mars anyway."

"And a prison break. I never saw a prison break before. It's so exciting."

"You're not going to see it. You're just going to hear about it. Come on, come on, all of you."

At that moment the room phone rang.

"Hello?" the widow Moriarity said.

"This is Jenkins, ma'am, desk. The spaceport called a few minutes ago. I'm not supposed to frighten you, but, well, they're rather worried about the prison break. The escaped convict, they

figure, will head for the spaceport. Disguised, he could—"

"Let him try masquerading as a member of *my* group!" the widow Moriarity said with a smile.

"All the same, if you could hurry—"

"We are hurrying, young man."

"Yes, ma'am."

The widow Moriarity hung up. "Gi-irls!"

The girls squealed and laughed and dawdled.

House Bartock felt like laughing.

He'd just had his first big break, and it might turn out to be the only one he needed. On an impulse, he had decided to strike out directly for the spaceport. He had done so, and now stood on the dark tarmac between the manifest shed and the pilot-barracks. And, not ten minutes after he had reached the spacefield a cordon of guards rushed there from Interstelpen had been stationed around the field. Had Bartock arrived just a few minutes later, he would have been too late, his capture only a matter of time. As it was now, though, he had a very good chance of getting away. Circumstances were in his favor.

He could get so far away that they would never find him.

It was simple. Get off Triton on a spaceship. Go anyplace that had a big spaceport, and manage to tranship out in secret. Then all the police would have

to search would be a few quadrillion square miles of space!

But first he had to leave Triton.

From the activity at the port, he could see that three ships were being made ready for blast-off. Two of them were purely cargo-carriers, but the third—Bartock could tell because he saw hand-luggage being loaded—would carry passengers. His instinct for survival must have been working overtime: he knew that the third ship would be his best bet, for if he were discovered and pursued, hostages might make the difference between recapture and freedom.

Bartock waited patiently in the darkness outside the pilot-barracks. The only problem was, how to discover which pilot belonged to which ship?

The cordon of police from Interstelpen had set up several score arc-lights on the perimeter of the field. The spaces between the lights were patrolled by guards armed, as Bartock was, with blasters. Bartock could never have made it through that cordon now. But it wasn't necessary. He was already inside.

The barracks door opened, and a pilot came out. Tensing, ready, Bartock watched him.

The three ships were scattered widely on the field, *Venus Bell* to the north, *Star of Hercules* to the south, *Mozart's Lady* to the east. *Venus Bell* and *Star of Hercules* were straight cargo carriers. *Mozart's Lady*—what a queer name for a spaceship,

Bartock couldn't help thinking—had taken in hand luggage. So if the pilot who had just left the barracks headed east, Bartock would take him. The pilot paused outside, lit a cigarette, hummed a tune. The scent of tobacco drifted over to Bartock. He waited.

The pilot walked east toward *Mozart's Lady*.

"Ready, girls?"

"Ready, Mrs. Moriarity. But couldn't we—well—sort of hang around until we see what happens?"

"You mean the escaped convict?"

"Yes, ma'am." Hopefully.

"They'll catch him. They always catch them."

"But—"

"Come on."

"Aw, gosh, Mrs. Moriarity."

"I said, come on."

Reluctantly, the hundred girls trooped with their chaperone from the hotel.

Bartock struck swiftly and without mercy.

The blaster would make too much noise. He turned it around, held it by the barrel, and broke the pilot's skull with it. In the darkness he changed clothing for the second time that night, quickly, confidently, his hands steady. In the darkness he could barely make out the pilot's manifest. The man's ship was *Mozart's Lady*, all right. Outbound from Triton City for Mars. Well, Bartock thought, he

wouldn't go to Mars. Assuming they learned what ship he had boarded, they would be guarding the inner orbits too closely.

He would take *Mozart's Lady* daringly outward, beyond Neptune's orbit. Naturally, the ship wouldn't have interstellar drive, but as yet Bartock wasn't going interstellar. You couldn't have everything. You couldn't expect a starship on Triton, could you? So Bartock would take *Mozart's Lady* outward to Pluto's orbit—and wait. From the amount of hand luggage taken aboard, *Mozart's Lady* would be carrying quite a number of passengers. If that number were reduced—drastically reduced—the food, water and air aboard would last for many months. Until the fuss died down. Until Bartock could bring *Mozart's Lady*, long since given up for lost, in for a landing on one of the inner planets . . .

Now he dragged the dead pilot's body into the complete darkness on the south side of the pilot-barracks, wishing he could hide it better but knowing he didn't have the time or the means.

Then he walked boldly across the tarmac, wearing a pilot's uniform, toward *Mozart's Lady*.

Fifteen minutes later, House Bartock watched with amazement while a hundred pretty young women boarded the ship. Of all the things that had happened since his escape, this came closest to unnerving him, for it was the totally unexpected. Bar-

tock shrugged, chain-smoked three cigarettes while the women boarded slowly, taking last-minute looks at dark Triton, the spaceport, the cordon of guards, the arc-lights. Bartock cursed impotently. Seconds were precious now. The pilot's body might be found. If it were...

At last the port clanged shut and the ground-crew tromped away. Since even an over-age ship like *Mozart's Lady* was close to ninety percent automatic, there was no crew. Only the pilot—who was Bartock—and the passengers.

Bartock was about to set the controls for blastoff when he heard footsteps clomp-clomping down the companionway. He toyed with the idea of locking the door, then realized that would arouse suspicion.

A square woman's face over a plump middle-aged figure.

"I'm Mrs. Moriarity, pilot. I have a hundred young girls aboard. We'll have no nonsense."

"No, sir. I mean, no ma'am."

"Well, make sure."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And I want an easy trip, without fuss or incidents. For half of our girls it's the second time in space—the first being when they came out here. You understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What happened to the pilot who took us out?"

"Uh, pressed into service last week on a Mercury run. I'm surprised the control board didn't tell you."

"They didn't. It doesn't matter. You do your job, and that's all."

"Yes, ma'am," House Bartock said. "Just my job."

A few moments later, *Mozart's Lady* blasted off.

"Stop! Hey, wait!" Pitchblend Hardesty bawled at the top of his voice. But it didn't do any good. The police rushed up behind Pitchblend, not daring to fire.

Moments before, they had found the dead pilot's body.

They knew at once what it meant, of course. They had been not more than a minute too late.

"Call Central Control on Neptune," a police officer said. "We'll send a cruiser after them."

"Won't do any good," Pitchblend Hardesty groaned.

"What are you talking about, fellow?"

"Unless the cruiser's brand new."

"On Neptune? Don't be silly. Newest one we've got is ten years old."

"Like I said, won't do any good. I worked that ship over, mister. I know what she's like inside. She may look like an over-age tub on the outside, but don't let that fool you. She's got power, mister. She's probably the fastest thing this side of the Jovian moons, except for those experimental one-man rocket-bombs down at Neptune Station. But chasing a big tub in a one-

man space-bound coffin—" here Pitchblend used the vernacular for the tiny one-man experimental ships—"ain't going to do anybody any good. Best thing you can do is track *Mozart's Lady* by radar and hope she'll head sunward. Then they could intercept her closer in."

But *Mozart's Lady* did not head sunward. Radar tracking confirmed this moments later. *Mozart's Lady* was outward bound for Pluto's orbit. And, with Pluto and Neptune currently in conjunction, that could even mean a landing, although, the police decided, that wasn't likely. There were no settlements on Pluto. Pluto was too weird. For the strangest reason in a solar system and a galaxy of wonders, Pluto was quite uninhabitable. More likely, *Mozart's Lady* would follow Pluto's orbit around, then make a dash sunward . . .

The radar officer threw up his hands. "I give up," he said. "She's heading for Pluto's orb all right. Call Neptune Station."

"Neptune Station, sir?"

"You bet. This job's too big for me. The brass will want to handle it."

Seconds later, sub-space crackled with energy as the call was put through from Triton City to Neptune Station.

Whatever else history would write about him, it would certainly call Johnny Mayhem the strangest—and literally most death-defying—test-pilot in his-

tory. Of course, testing the sleek experimental beauties out of Neptune Station and elsewhere wasn't Mayhem's chief occupation. He was, in a phrase, a trouble-shooter for the Galactic League. Whenever he had a spare few weeks, having completed an assignment ahead of schedule in his latest of bodies, he was likely to turn up at some testing station or other and volunteer for work. He was never turned down, although the Galactic League didn't approve. Mayhem was probably the galaxy's best pilot, with incredible reflexes and an utter indifference toward death.

For the past two weeks, having completed what turned out to be an easier-than-expected assignment on Neptune, he had been piloting the space-bound coffins out of Neptune Station, and with very satisfactory experimental results.

A few minutes ago he had been called into the station director's office, but when he entered he was surprised to see the Galactic League Firstman of Neptune waiting for him.

"Surprised, eh?" the Firstman demanded.

"I'll bet you want me to quit test-flying," Mayhem said with a smile which, clearer than words, told the Firstman his advice would be rejected.

The Firstman smiled too. "Why, no, Mayhem. As a matter of fact, I want you to take one of the coffins into deep space."

"Maybe something's wrong

with my hearing," Mayhem said.

"No. You heard it right. Of course, it's up to you. Everything you do, you volunteer."

"Let's hear it, Firstman."

So the Firstman of Neptune told Johnny Mayhem about *Mozart's Lady* which, six hours ago, had left Triton for Pluto's orbit with an eccentric wealthy widow, a hundred girls, and a desperate escaped killer.

"The only thing we have out here fast enough to overtake them, Mayhem, is the one-man coffins. The only man we have who can fly them is you. What do you say?"

Mayhem's answer was a question, but the question didn't really require an answer. Mayhem asked: "What are we waiting for?"

The Firstman grinned. He had expected such an answer, of course. The whole galaxy, let alone the solar system, knew the Mayhem legend. Every world which had an Earthman population and a Galactic League post, however small, had a body in cold storage, waiting for Johnny Mayhem if his services were required. But of course no one knew precisely when Mayhem's services might be required. No one knew exactly under what circumstances the Galactic League Council, operating from the hub of the Galaxy, might summon Mayhem. And only a very few people, including those at the Hub and the Galactic League Firstmen on civilized worlds and Observers on primi-

tive worlds, knew the precise mechanics of Mayhem's coming.

Johnny Mayhem, a bodiless sentience. Mayhem — Johnny Marlow, then—who had been chased from Earth, a pariah and a criminal, eight years ago, who had been mortally wounded on a wild planet deep within the Saggiarian Swarm, whose life had been saved—after a fashion—by the white magic of that planet. Mayhem, doomed now to possible immortality as a bodiless sentience, an *elan*, which could occupy and activate a corpse if it had been frozen properly . . . an *elan* doomed to wander eternally because it could not remain in one body for more than a month without body and *elan* perishing. Mayhem, who had dedicated his strange, lonely life to the service of the Galactic League because a normal life and normal social relations were not possible for him . . .

"One thing, Mayhem," the Firstman said, now, on Neptune. "How much longer you have in that body of yours?"

"Five days. Possibly six."

"That doesn't give you much time. If you're caught out there when your month is up—"

"I won't be. We're wasting time talking about it."

"—it would mean your death."

"Then let's get started."

The Firstman stared at him levelly. "You're a brave man, Mayhem."

"Let's say I'm not afraid to

die. I've been a living dead man for eight years. Come on."

One of the so-called coffins, a tiny one-man ship barely big enough for a prone man, food concentrates and water, was already waiting at the station spacefield.

Ten minutes after hearing about *Mozart's Lady*, without fanfare, Mayhem blasted off in pursuit.

Maintaining top speed all the way, House Bartock brought *Mozart's Lady* across almost two billion miles of space from Neptune's to Pluto's orbit in three days. He was delighted with the speed. It would have taken the average space-tub ten days to two weeks and, since as far as Bartock knew there were nothing but average space-tubs on Neptune, that gave him a considerable head-start.

It was Jane Cummings-First Violin who discovered Bartock's identity. Bartock was studying the star-map at the time and considered himself safe from discovery because he kept the control door of *Mozart's Lady* locked. However, Jane Cummings had established something of a liaison with the pilot outward bound from Earth and Mars, so she had been given a spare key which she'd kept, secretly, all the time the symphony was on Triton. Now, curious about the new pilot for the same reason that the miners on Triton had been curious about the symphony, Jane made

her way forward, inserted her key in the lock, and pushed open the control door.

"Hello there," she said.

House Bartock whirled. The turning of a key in the lock had so unnerved him—it was the last thing he expected—that he forgot to shut off the star-map. Its tell-tale evidence glowed on the wall over his head.

"What do you want?" he managed to ask politely.

"Oh, just to say hello."

"You already said it."

Jane Cummings pouted. "You needn't bite my head off. What's your name? Mine's Jane, and I play the violin. It wouldn't hurt you to be polite."

Bartock nodded, deciding that a little small talk wouldn't hurt if he could keep the girl from becoming suspicious. That was suddenly important. If this girl had a key to the control room, for all he knew there could be others.

"My, you have been hurrying," Jane said. "I could tell by the acceleration. You must be trying to break the speed records or something. I'll bet we're almost to Earth—"

Her voice trailed off and her mouth hung open. At first Bartock didn't know what was the matter. Then he saw where she was staring.

The star-map.

"We're not heading for Earth!" she cried.

Bartock walked toward her. "Give me that key," he said. "You're going to have to stay

here with me. Give me that key."

Jane backed away. "You—you couldn't be our pilot. If you were—"

"The key. I don't want to hurt you."

Bartock lunged. Jane turned and ran, slamming the door behind her. It clanged, and echoed. The echo didn't stop. Bartock, on the point of opening the door and sprinting down the companionway after her, stopped.

It wasn't the echo of metal slamming against metal. It was the radar warning.

Either *Mozart's Lady* was within dangerous proximity of a meteor, or a ship was following them.

Bartock ran to the radar screen.

The pip was unmistakable. A ship was following them.

A ship as fast—or faster—than *Mozart's Lady*.

Cursing, Bartock did things with the controls. *Mozart's Lady*, already straining, increased its speed. Acceleration flung Bartock back in the pilot's chair. Pluto loomed dead ahead.

Johnny Mayhem knew at what precise moment he had been discovered, for suddenly the speed of *Mozart's Lady* increased. Since this had occurred an hour and a half after Mayhem had first got a clear pip of the bigger ship on his radar, it meant he'd been spotted.

Prone with his hands stretched forward in the coffin-like ex-

perimental ship, Mayhem worked the controls, exactly matching speed with *Mozart's Lady*.

He tried to put himself in the position of the escaped convict. What would he do? His best bet would be to swing in close around Pluto, as close as he dared. Then, on the dark side of the planet, to change his orbit abruptly and come loose of its gravitational field in a new direction. It was a dangerous maneuver, but since the escaped convict now knew for sure that the tiny ship could match the speed of *Mozart's Lady*, it was his only hope. The danger was grave: even a first-rate pilot would try it only as a last resort, for the gravitational pull of Pluto might upset *Mozart's Lady's* orbit. If that happened, the best the convict could hope for was an emergency landing. More likely, a death-crash would result.

Seconds later, Mayhem's thinking was confirmed. *Mozart's Lady* executed a sharp turn in space and disappeared behind the white bulk of Pluto.

Mayhem swore and followed. "He's trying to kill us all!"

"He doesn't know how to pilot a ship! We're helpless, helpless!"

"Do something, Mrs. Moriarity!"

"Now girls, whatever happens, you must keep calm. We can only assume that Jane was right about what she saw, but since none of us can pilot a spaceship, we'll have to bide our time..."

"Bide our time!"

"We're all as good as dead!"

One of the girls began screaming.

Mrs. Moriarity slapped her. "I'm sorry, dear. I had to hit you. Your behavior bordered on the hysterical. And if we become hysterical we are lost, lost, do you understand?"

"Yes'm."

"Good. Then we wait and see what happens."

What was happening was an attempt at what test-pilots term planet-swinging. Moving in the direction of Pluto's orbit, *Mozart's Lady* swung in very close behind the planet. Then, as the rotation of Pluto on its axis hurled it forth again, as a sling-shot hurls a pellet, *Mozart's Lady's* rockets would alter the expected direction of flight. Unless a pursuing ship followed exactly the same maneuver, it would be flung off into space at top-speed in the wrong direction. It might be hours before the first ship's trail could be picked up again—if ever.

House Bartock, aware of all this—and one other factor—sat sweating it out at the controls.

The one other factor was closeness to Pluto. For if you got too close, and the difference was only a matter of miles covered in an elapsed time of milliseconds, Pluto might drag you into a landing orbit. If that happened, traveling at tremendous speed, there'd be the double danger of overheating in the planet's

atmosphere and coming down too hard. Either way the results could be fatal.

His hands sweating, Bartock struggled with the controls. Now already he could see Pluto bulking, its night-side black and mysterious, in the viewport. Now he could hear the faint shrill scream of its atmosphere. Now . . .

Trying to time it perfectly, he slammed on full power.

A fraction of a milli-second too late.

Mozart's Lady stood for an instant on its tail, shuddering as if it were going to come apart and rain meteoric dust over Pluto's surface. That had happened too in such a maneuver, but it didn't happen now.

Instead, *Mozart's Lady* went into a landing orbit.

But its speed was still terrific and, lowering, it whizzed twice around Pluto's fifteen thousand mile circumference in twenty minutes. Atmosphere screamed, the heat siren shrilled, and a cursing House Bartock applied the braking rockets as fast as he could.

Pluto's surface blurred in the viewport, coming closer at dizzying speed. Bartock stood *Mozart's Lady* on its tail a second time, this time on purpose.

The ship shuddered, and struck Pluto.

Bartock blacked out.

When Mayhem's radar screen informed him that *Mozart's Lady* had failed to break free of

Pluto's field of gravity, Mayhem immediately went to work. First he allowed the tiny scout-ship to complete its planet-swing successfully, then he slowed down, turned around in deep space, and came back, scanning Pluto with radar scopes and telescope until he located the bigger ship. That might have taken hours or days ordinarily, but having seen *Mozart's Lady* go in, and having recorded its position via radar, Mayhem had a pretty good idea as to the landing orbit it would follow.

It took him three-quarters of an hour to locate the bigger ship. When he finally had located it, he brought it into close-up with the more powerful of the two telescopes aboard the scout.

Mozart's Lady lay on its side in a snow-tundra. It had been damaged, but not severely. Part of the visible side was caved in, but the ship had not fallen apart. Still, chances were that without extensive repairs it would not be able to leave Pluto.

There was no way, Mayhem knew, of making extensive repairs on Pluto. *Mozart's Lady* was there to stay.

The safe thing to do would be to inform Neptune and wait in space until the police cruisers came for House Bartock. The alternative was to planetfall near *Mozart's Lady*, take the convict into custody, and then notify Neptune.

If Bartock were alone the choice would have been an easy one. But Bartock was not alone.

He had a hundred girls with him. He was desperate. He might try anything.

Mayhem had to go down after him.

The trouble was, though, that of all the worlds in the galaxy—not merely in Sol System—Pluto was the one most dangerous to Johnny Mayhem. He had been pursuing House Bartock for three days. Which meant he had two days left before it was imperative that he leave his current body. This would mean notifying the hub of the Galaxy by sub-space radio to pull out his *elan*, but Pluto's heavyside layer was the strongest in the solar system, so strong that sub-space radio couldn't penetrate it.

And that was not the only thing wrong with Pluto. It was, in fact, an incredible anomaly of a world. Almost four billion miles from the sun at its widest swing, it still was not too cold to support life. Apparently radioactive heat in its core kept it warm. It even had an Earth-type atmosphere, although the oxygen-content was somewhat too rich and apt to make you giddy. And it was a slow world.

Time moved slowly on Pluto. Too slowly. When you first landed, according to the few explorers who had attempted it, the native fauna seemed like statues. Their movement was too slow for the eye to register. That was lucky, for the fauna tended to be enormous and deadly. But after a while—how long a while

Mayhem didn't know—the fauna, subjectively, seemed to speed up. The animals commenced moving slowly, then a bit faster, then normally. That, Mayhem knew, was entirely subjective. The animals of Pluto were not changing their rate of living: the visitor to Pluto was slowing down to match their laggard pace.

Two days, thought Mayhem. That was all he had. And, hours after he landed, he'd start to slow down. There was absolutely no way of telling how much time elapsed once that happened, for the only clocks that did not go haywire on Pluto were spring-wind clocks, and there hadn't been a spring-wind clock in the solar system for a hundred and fifty years.

Result? On Pluto Mayhem would slow down. Once he reached Pluto's normal time rate it might take him, say, ten minutes to run—top-speed—from point A to point B, fifteen yards apart. Subjectively, a split-second of time would have gone by in that period.

Two days would seem like less than an hour, and Mayhem would have no way of judging how much less.

If he didn't get off Pluto in two days he would die.

If he didn't land, House Bartock, growing desperate and trying to scare him off or trying to keep control of the hundred girls while he made a desperate and probably futile attempt to repair

the damaged *Mozart's Lady*, might become violent.

Mayhem called Neptune, and said: "Bartock crash-landed on Pluto, geographical coordinates north latitude thirty-three degrees four minutes, west longitude eighteen degrees even. I'm going down. That's all."

He didn't wait for an answer.

He brought the space-bound coffin down a scant three miles from *Mozart's Lady*. Here, though, the tundra of Pluto was buckled and convoluted, so that two low jagged ranges of snow-clad hills separated the ships.

Again Mayhem didn't wait. He went outside, took a breath of near-freezing air, and stalked up the first range of hills. He carried a blaster buckled to his belt.

When he saw the scout-ship come down, Bartock didn't wait either. He might have waited had he known anything about what Pluto did to the time-sense. But he did not know. He only knew, after a quick inspection, that the controls of *Mozart's Lady* had been so badly damaged that repair was impossible.

He knew too that the scout-ship had reported his whereabouts. He had, on regaining consciousness, been in time to intercept the radio message. True, it would take any other Neptune-stationed ship close to two weeks to reach Pluto, so Bartock had some temporal leeway. But obviously whoever was pursuing him in the one-man

ship had not come down just to sit and wait. He was out there in the snow somewhere. Well, Bartock would go out too, would somehow manage to elude his pursuer, to get behind him, reach the scout-ship and blast off in it. And, in the event that anything went wrong, he would have a hostage.

He went arearships to select one.

Went with his desperation shackled by an iron nerve.

And a blaster in his hand.

"... very lucky," Matilda Moriarity was saying, trying to keep the despair from her voice. "We have some cuts and bruises, but no serious casualties. Why, we might have all been killed."

"Lucky, she says! We're marooned here. Marooned—with a killer."

Before the widow Moriarity could defend her choice of words, if she was going to defend them, House Bartock came into the rear lounge, where the entire symphony and its chaperone was located. They would have locked the door, of course; they had locked it ever since they had learned who Bartock was. But the door, buckled and broken, had been one of the casualties of the crash-landing.

"You," Bartock said.

He meant Jane Cummings.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. We're going outside."

"Out—side?"

"That's what I said. Let's get a move on."

Jane Cummings didn't move.

The widow Moriarity came between her and Bartock. "If you must take anyone, take me," she said bravely.

"The girl."

Still the widow Moriarity didn't move.

House Bartock balled his fist and hit her. Three of the girls caught her as she fell. None of them tried to do anything about Bartock, who had levelled his blaster at Jane Cummings.

Trembling, she went down the companionway with him.

A fierce cold wind blew as they opened the airlock door.

It looked like a sea-serpent floundering in the snow.

Only, it was caught in the act of floundering, like an excellent candid shot of a sea-serpent floundering in snow.

Its movements were too slow for Mayhem's eyes to register.

Which meant, he realized gratefully, that he hadn't begun to slow down yet.

He had to be careful, though. If he were Bartock he would make immediately for the scout-ship. It would be his only hope.

Realizing this, Mayhem had gone through deep snow for what he judged to be fifteen minutes, until he had reached a spine of rock protruding from the snow. Then he had doubled back, now leaving no footprints, along the spine. He was waiting in the first low range of hills not four hundred yards from the scout-ship, his blaster ready. When

Bartock prowled into view, Mayhem would shout a warning. If Bartock didn't heed it, Mayhem would shoot him dead.

It seemed like an airtight plan.

And it would have been, except for two things. First, Bartock had a hostage. And second, Pluto-time was beginning to act on Mayhem.

He realized this when he looked at the sea-serpent again. The long neck moved with agonizing slowness, the great gray green bulk of the monster, sixty feet long, shifted slowly, barely perceptibly, in the snow. Mountains of powdery snow moved and settled. The spade-shaped head pointed at Mayhem. The tongue protruded slowly, hung suspended, forked and hideous, then slowly withdrew.

The neck moved again, ten feet long, sinuous. And faster. Faster? Not really.

Mayhem was slowing down.

Then he saw Bartock and the girl.

They were close together. Bartock held her arm. Walking toward the scout-ship, they were too far away and too close together for Mayhem to fire. Bartock would know this and wouldn't heed any warning.

So Mayhem didn't give any warning. He left the spine of rock and rushed down through the snow toward the space-bound coffin.

A low rumble of sound broke the absolute stillness.

It was the monster, and now that his own hearing had slowed down, Mayhem was able to hear the slower cycles of sound. How much time had really passed? He didn't know. How much time did he have left before death came swiftly and suddenly because he had been too long in his temporary body? He didn't know that either. He sprinted toward the scout-ship. At least it felt like he was sprinting. He didn't know how fast he was really moving. But the sea-serpent creature was coming up behind him, faster. No place near what would have been its normal apparent speed, but faster. Mayhem, his breath coming raggedly through his mouth, ran as fast as was feasible.

So did Bartock and the girl.

It was Bartock, spotting Mayhem on the run, who fired first. Mayhem fell prone as the raw *zing* of energy ripped past. The sea-serpent-like-creature behind him bellowed.

And reared.

It didn't look like a sea-serpent any longer. It looked like a dinosaur, with huge solid rear limbs, small forelimbs, a great head with an enormous jaw—and speed.

Now it could really move.

Subjectively, time seemed normal to Mayhem. Your only basis was subjective: time always seemed normal. But Mayhem knew, as he got up and ran again, that he was now moving slower than the minute hand on a clock. Slower . . . as objective

time, as measured in the solar system at large, sped by.

He tripped as the creature came behind him. The only thing he could do was prop up an elbow in the snow and fire. Raw energy ripped off the two tiny forelimbs, but the creature didn't falter. It rushed by Mayhem, almost crushing him with the hind limbs, each of which must have weighed a couple of tons. It lumbered toward Bartock and Jane Cummings.

Turning and starting to get up, Mayhem fired again.

His blaster jammed.

Then the bulk of the monster cut off his view of Bartock, the girl and the scout-ship. He heard the girl scream. He ran toward them.

Jane Cummings had never been so close to death. She wanted to scream. She thought all at once, hysterically, she was a little girl again. If she screamed maybe the terrible apparition would go away. But it did not go away. It reared up high, as high as a very tall tree, and its fangs were hideous.

Bartock, who was also frightened, raised his blaster, fired, and missed.

Then, for an instant, Jane thought she saw someone running behind the monster. He had a blaster too, and he lifted it. When he fired, there was only a clicking sound. Then he fired again.

Half the monster's bulk disappeared and it collapsed in the snow.

That was when Bartock shot the other man.

Mayhem felt the stab of raw energy in his shoulder. He spun around and fell down, his senses whirling in a vortex of pain. Dimly he was aware of Bartock's boots crunching on the snow.

They fired simultaneously. Bartock missed.

And collapsed with a searing hole in his chest. He was dead before he hit the snow.

The girl went to Mayhem. "Who—who are you?"

"Got to get you back to the ship. No time to talk. Hurry."

"But you can't walk like that. You're badly hurt. I'll bring help."

"... dangerous. I'll take you."

He'd take her, flirting with death. Because, for all he knew, his time on Pluto, objectively, had already totalled forty-eight hours. If it did, he would never live to get off Pluto. Once his thirty days were up, he would die. Still, there might be danger from other animals between the scout-ship and *Mozart's Lady*, and he couldn't let the girl go back alone. It was almost ludicrous, since she had to help him to his feet.

He staggered along with her, knowing he would never make it to *Mozart's Lady* and back in time. But if he left her, she was probably doomed too. He'd sacrifice his life for hers...

They went a hundred yards, Mayhem gripping the blaster and advancing by sheer effort of

(Continued on page 146)

MISSION: MURDER!

By O. H. LESLIE

ILLUSTRATOR KEITH

*The world of the future might
turn out to be a place where,
among other things, you can't
separate the heroes from
the villains.*

MR. SKADE, his benign, sun-browned face as placid as a Buddha's, stood in the office elevator, holding his expensive Homburg daintily in both hands. He stepped out on the lobby floor and strolled unhurriedly towards the cigar stand, where the proprietor had the corona corona waiting. He lit the cigar for Mr. Skade, who murmured congenial thanks and went in measured strides towards the revolving doors. He looked like a man well-satisfied with the world and his place in it; when he emerged on the sidewalk, he breathed deeply of the crisp autumn air, and tilted his gloved hand at a cruising taxi.

But the taxi was unable to reach him. From the corner, an inconspicuous gray automobile jerked forward in a sudden thrust of power, cutting off the

cab and swinging in front of him. Instead of halting, it slowed to a speed that permitted Mr. Skade one studied look at its grim-faced occupants and the gleaming automatics they held. His mouth fell open and the cigar dropped to the pavement. His mouth was still open when the shooting started, and the heavy slugs were ripping through the fine wool of his overcoat. His mouth was open when he dropped to the ground, kicking his legs in protest at the brevity of life, while the gray automobile roared away from the scene of sudden, surprising murder.

Steve Stryker let the door click shut behind him. He hung his hat and coat in the hall closet, and walked into the darkened living room. He seemed to



They went swiftly about their deadly work.

know that Kathy would be waiting for him there, even though it was past midnight. When he spoke, it was in a voice suited to the quiet of the night.

"Kathy?"

She lifted her head from the sofa's arm, a slim figure in silhouette. Even without seeing her face, it was clear that the girl's eyes were pained, her mouth drawn.

"What time is it?" she said.

"Late. I'm sorry I didn't call. Had no idea it would take so long. The meeting."

"That's all right." Her voice held no forgiveness. "I'm getting used to it by now, Steve. Isn't that the best thing I can do? Get used to it?"

"Kathy—" He sat on the sofa, and she moved away from his reconciliatory touch. "Listen, honey, I know how you must feel. But this new job I'm on, it has a lot of screwy angles. If you'd only understand."

"Maybe I would understand. If you'd tell me more about it. Or maybe you think I'm not smart enough to grasp it."

"It's not that."

He turned his head from her, the clean profile with the still boyish cheek and mouth outlined sharply against the moonlit window. In the darkness, he had a look of innocence that Kathy found touching. But with the lights on, there was a lined gray hardness about Steve Stryker's face, a look that could frighten and worry her. She was worried now.

"Well, what is it then?" Kathy said. "Steve, I've never nagged you about this, not ever. But we'll be married almost a year. And I know less about you now than before. Do you think that's fair?"

He reached up and flicked on the table lamp. The light fell softly on Kathy's face, a face that shared a child-like sweetness with womanly beauty. There was a tear-stain on the cheek.

"Listen, Kathy. The kind of work I do—well, it's not easy to explain. The firm I work for is new; just finding its way. We take on all kinds of assignments, everything from personal protection to dogwalking. Sometimes, we have late hours, and sometimes we have to go out of town. But you know it pays well—"

He made a gesture with his hand, indicating the luxury of the apartment.

"I know," his wife said. "I'm not complaining about the money, Steve. And I know I really don't have the right to cross-examine you . . ."

He kissed her.

In a few minutes, the pain was gone from her voice.

"I wasn't really so lonely," she said lightly, her arms about his neck. "I had a visitor tonight. Very handsome young man."

"Oh? Who?"

She laughed. "Doug." Doug Stryker was Steve's younger brother. "He called around nine

and wanted to come up. I told him you weren't home, but he sounded so excited that I felt sorry for him. I told him to come up and wait."

"What was Doug so excited about?"

"He got a job today. In some kind of brokerage house. Ninety-five dollars a week, with a promise of more if he makes good. He talked for two hours straight about it; I don't think I ever saw him so excited."

"You know how Doug is," Steve chuckled. "Ever since he got out of college, he thinks the world's a big toy shop, full of surprise packages with his name on them. Did he say he'd call again?"

"I invited him for dinner tomorrow."

His face changed. "Tomorrow? I don't think—"

"Steve!"

"Honey, I just can't be sure. I told you how it is. We're trying to make a go of the company, and sometimes that calls for personal sacrifice—"

"Whose sacrifice, Steve?"

She looked at the floor, and her arms were cold when he gripped them. Then she got up from the sofa and went into the bedroom.

Mr. Ergman returned the menu to the grinning waiter, and lifted his sherry glass to take a contented sip of the amber stuff. The waiter, taught by experience that swift service to Mr. Ergman's table produced a

generous tip, scurried off to the kitchen.

But Mr. Ergman seemed like a patient man. He surveyed the plush surroundings of the restaurant, the wine-red carpeting and snowy tablecloths, the muted lighting and gleaming brass fittings, and smiled a small smile of peace. A matronly woman, seeing the smile on his handsome lips, returned it. But Mr. Ergman wasn't interested in flirtations; he seemed happy in his self-sufficiency, satisfied to drink his sherry and wait for the superbly-prepared meal that would soon be his. It seemed as if nothing could disturb the serenity, until an outburst of sound in the doorway of the restaurant caused the smile to disappear.

"Gentlemen, please—" It was the headwaiter's shrill voice, and the plea was drowned in a chorus of shrieks from the women in the dining room. The three men at the velvet rope were dressed in somber gray, their felt hats pushed well over their foreheads, the bottom portions of their faces concealed by neatly-tied handkerchiefs. Each held an automatic, and each pair of eyes was moving keenly, searchingly over the crowd.

Mr. Ergman stood up, a look of annoyance on his face. The look became something else when he saw the eyes of the intruders halt when they met his. Then the three men were pushing their way past the ring of frightened waiters and patrons,

and the muzzles of their weapons described a path that ended on the clean white shirt front of Mr. Ergman himself.

He started to say something, but all that was heard was the thunder of gunfire. The white shirt front darkened blood-red, and Mr. Ergman's hand, seeking support, pulled the lamp from the table with a loud crash. Then he toppled over, and died hungry.

"All right," Steve Stryker laughed. "I can see you're dying to talk about it, so go ahead." His words were affectionate.

Doug Stryker wiped his mouth with his napkin, and said:

"Gee, Kathy, I hate to bore you all over again with this stuff—"

"Don't worry about me," the girl said, getting up to stack dishes on her arm. "I've got an hour's work in the kitchen, so you can talk all you like. Sure you don't want more coffee?"

"No, thanks." He grinned at her, suddenly shy. Doug was twenty-one, and so was his brother's wife.

"Let's adjourn to the living room," Steve said. "And you can tell me all about it. From what I gather, you're turning into some kind of wolf of Wall Street."

"Who knows? Mr. Fletcher's done okay. I betcha he's worth a million bucks. Maybe I'll learn his secret."

In the living room, Doug Stryker's face, a younger, thinner,

more ingenious copy of Steve's, became lighted with enthusiasm as he spoke of his new job. He was so enraptured with his subject that he didn't notice Steve's own lack of genuine interest.

"Fletcher's quite a guy," he said, licking his lips. "One of these gray-haired types, with slick clothes and a little moustache. Real distinguished. Drives a car three blocks long. Boy, it takes dough to live it up like that! And I figure if Fletcher made it in the market, why couldn't—"

"Sure," Steve laughed. "Why not? The world's your oyster, too, Doug. Only you're going to find the biggest pearl of all."

His brother's smile was almost silly. "Why not?"

They looked up as Kathy came into the room. There was puzzlement on her pretty face.

"That's something, isn't it?" she said. "The third one in a week—"

"What?" Steve said.

"I just heard it on the kitchen radio. There's been another one of those awful shootings; a man named Curtis this time. They came right into a movie theatre and shot him down—" She shivered.

"How do you like that?" Doug Stryker said, still smiling. "Sounds like old Chicago. I always thought that kind of gang warfare went out with prohibition."

Steve said nothing.

"That's what the announcer was saying," Kathy told them.

"The police can't seem to make any sense out of it. Usually, they know when this kind of thing is going to happen, but they can't figure it out. Imagine! In this day and age—"

"I thought today's crooks were slicker," Doug said. "Syndicates and all that. But I guess you never can tell. Maybe they're reverting to type—"

"Could be," Steve said uncomfortably. "But let's hear about the job, huh? That's a lot more interesting to me."

Doug picked up the thread of his thoughts and went on talking about Wall Street. But despite his words, Steve Stryker didn't appear to be interested at all.

Mr. Molton tapped the rolled concert program against the palm of his hand, and surveyed the babbling intermission crowd with a tolerant smile. He was a little bit taller than anyone else, a little more handsome, a little more impeccable in his evening clothes than the other male attendants of the symphony. The fact earned him well-concealed glances of envy from the men, and less well-concealed glances of admiration from the women. Neither seemed to affect his aloofness, his solitary enjoyment of the cold clear night and the cold clear Debussy he had just heard. He lit a cigarette and leaned against the doorway, his arms folded, his eyes almost sleepy in their quiet contentment.

But his eyes snapped open like sprung window shades when the screech of brakes sounded a discordant A on the street outside the concert hall. A car door slammed open, and a small army of gray-suited men descended upon the lobby, their faces a mystery behind the close-fitting masks that covered nose and chin. One kicked at a door, and the others poured through, waving automatics at the horrified crowd. For a moment, there was only panic, and then Mr. Molton found himself alone in the doorway, ringed by the intruders, an easy target for the circle of weapons that surrounded him. Inside, a violin sounded a tuning-up arpeggio. But outside, there was only percussion—and death.

The telephone's ring was abrupt; Steve Stryker's hand swiftly cut off the sound. But he wasn't in time to keep Kathy from stirring on the pillow and waking. She watched him as he put the receiver close to his face.

"Stryker," he said softly, and listened.

Then: "All right. Half an hour."

"Half an hour what?" Kathy said. "Steve, you're not going out?"

"I'm sorry, Kathy."

"What time is it?" She shifted to see the illuminated dial of the clock. "Two-thirty! Steve, this is crazy— It's getting worse and worse—"

"Kathy, I *have* to go. Believe me, it's urgent."

"*What* is? What could be so urgent? What kind of crazy people do you work for?"

"Don't get hysterical over this—"

She sat up in bed. "Steve, don't go. No matter what they said. I don't want you to go."

He continued to dress, without looking at her.

"Steve, I can't take this kind of thing much longer. I swear to you. If you leave me now—without explaining—without anything—"

"For Pete's sake!" he murmured angrily. "Don't *expect* so much from me, Kathy. Can't you have a little faith?"

"And that's the worst part! Making *me* feel guilty. Expecting *me* to have faith and trust while you—" She turned her head into the pillow and began to sob.

"Kathy!" His voice ached. "Kathy, I haven't got time for soothing words now. Do you understand? I haven't got *time*. You'll just have to take things as they are—"

She wouldn't reply. He started to go to her, but changed his mind and left the bedroom.

She let the tears flow freely for a while, and then got out of bed, her face determined. She went into the hallway, where her husband was removing his hat and topcoat from the closet. She stood in the shadows, soundlessly, conscious that Steve wasn't aware of her presence. Then she

started to say something, bitter words that would close a door between them forever, but his action stopped the speech in her throat. He was taking something from the lining of his coat, something that flashed light from the hanging bulb of the closet, something that clicked metallically as he touched it.

"Steve!"

His head jerked up, his eyes bewildered. Then he crammed the automatic into his pocket.

"Steve," she said again, coming towards him. "Steve, if you're in trouble—"

He stared at her for a moment, and then turned away.

When the door slammed behind him, Kathy Stryker stood motionlessly, afraid to let her mind grasp what her eyes had seen.

Doug Stryker reached across the table as if to take Kathy's hand. But at the last moment, shyness overcame him, and he didn't complete the consoling gesture. Instead, he waved the hand at a waiter, and asked for more coffee.

"It—it's nice of you to meet me," Kathy said. "I've been so upset for the last few days, Doug—"

"Sure, I know," Steve's brother said. "I'm glad you called me, Kathy."

"Then you really think there's nothing to worry about?"

"Of course I do!" He pushed aside the lunch dishes and leaned closer. "Listen, I've

known Steve a heck of a lot longer than you have, Kathy. Why, that guy's as honest as they come. So honest it hurts. I can't imagine that he'd be mixed up in something—crooked. Not Steve!"

"But people do change, Doug. You know that."

"People do, maybe. But not Steve."

"I wish I could be so sure. It's not just the gun that bothers me; Steve says that his work is sometimes dangerous, that he has to be armed. Some kind of bodyguard protection or something. But if he wasn't so mysterious about it—"

"That's the way Steve is. Not talkative." Doug grinned. "Not like me. I could bend your ears off." He looked at his watch.

"I'm sorry," Kathy said. "I know it's late—"

"Yeah. Guess I'd better get back to the office. Mr. Fletcher wanted to see me at two."

"Let's not wait for more coffee," Kathy said. "I feel better now, honest I do, Doug. You've been very sweet."

He flushed. "Heck, the pleasure was all mine. But don't you worry about Steve anymore, Kath. He's a great guy—even if he is my brother."

They left the restaurant together, and Doug saw the girl into a taxi. Then he walked quickly down the street towards the building that housed the Eli Fletcher Company. When he entered the office, the minute hand of the big clock in the

lobby was almost touching two, and his footsteps quickened. He knew that Mr. Fletcher liked punctuality, and Doug Stryker was learning to like what Mr. Fletcher liked.

He rapped discreetly on the door of the executive office, and at Mr. Fletcher's deep-bari-toned "Come in!" turned the knob.

Mr. Fletcher was at his desk, the shining cone of the dictating machine at his lips. He didn't look up as Doug Stryker entered, but continued to recite the impressive phrases of a business letter involving a transaction of several hundred thousand dollars. Doug watched him patiently, admiring, as usual, his employer's distinguished manner and appearance: the waxy white hair and neatly-trimmed moustache, the fine head and well-tailored shoulders. Finally, Mr. Fletcher completed his task, and turned to greet him.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Yes, I did, Doug. Matter of fact, I thought we'd discuss this business about assigning you to certain accounts. Nothing very big at the moment, of course, but I have some clients who—"

The words were making Doug Stryker very happy, and he listened to them eagerly. But suddenly, the words stopped, as if Mr. Fletcher had been stricken by some inner doubt. His gray eyes went past Doug to the door, and the young man whirled about in their direction, just in

time to see it slam open and crash against the office wall.

"What is this?" Mr. Fletcher said, rising to his feet.

There were three men in the doorway, gray-suited and masked, and behind them, frozen in fright, Mr. Fletcher's executive secretary stood with her hands to her mouth.

"What do you want?" Mr. Fletcher said sternly. "Miss Hargraves—"

Then the automatics were drawn from within the gray suits, and the barrels were pointing to the desk.

"Get away from him!" one of the men shouted, in Doug's direction.

But Doug Stryker, too young to believe in sudden death, gave in to an impulse, an impulse that makes heroes and corpses. He braced his young, strong body, and sprang in the direction of the intruders. He plowed into one of them, who grunted and raised his arm in defense, while the other two men, unheeding of the attack, fired their weapons at the man behind the desk. Doug didn't see Mr. Fletcher cough and die; he didn't know his effort was now futile, and that the man he was protecting was beyond his help. He continued to struggle, and his hand went up to the close-fitting handkerchief that covered the killer's face. He ripped it free, and saw something that caused an explosion in his brain. Then the men were fleeing from the office, disappearing into the

bowels of the huge office building.

But Doug Stryker, even when he realized that his employer had been shot and killed before his eyes, had only one word in his mind, a word that hammered at his consciousness with terrible force.

Steve! Steve! Steve!

He knew there was something special about the evening the moment he saw Kathy take the silver candlesticks from the drawer and set them on the table. Then, her eyes shining, she disappeared into the bedroom and emerged fifteen minutes later, wearing something satiny and V-necked, with a string of glistening gems around her neck. He reached for her arm as she headed for the kitchen again, and pulled her towards him.

"Hey!" he grinned. "What's the big occasion?"

"Never mind," she said. "I just feel like dressing up to-night."

"You can't kid me. Something's up."

"Sure you don't want me to shave or something? Looks like a pretty fancy dinner you've got going there."

"Just some roast. But I thought I'd open that bottle of wine Doug sent us. It's just *sitting* there, and—"

Steve chuckled. "Now I *know* it's a special occasion. Hey, this isn't our anniversary or something?"

"Nothing like that. I just feel like celebrating."

"I know you better than that, sweetie. You like to celebrate for a reason. Does it have anything to do with where you went today?"

"Today? Oh, I just went into town. Met Doug for lunch, as a matter of fact. He's excited as a kid about this job of his—"

"And where'd you go after lunch?"

She kissed him on the mouth and then stood up. "You're too curious."

Twenty minutes later, she turned out the dining room lights and lit the candles. The soft glow found new loveliness in her face; he sat across the table and looked at her with tangled emotions.

She filled his wine glass, and he lifted it to his eyes.

"To Kathy," he said softly.

"To me," she said lightly. "And to you. And to—Steve, Junior."

There wasn't time for him to react. There wasn't time for him to take her in his arms and say the words she wanted to hear, to complete for her this moment of happiness. Before he could rise from the table and express his joy, the front door slammed open and Doug Stryker was striding to the doorway of the dining room, hatless, wild-eyed, the shoulders of his topcoat dampened by rain.

"Doug!" Kathy said. "Doug, what's wrong?"

Steve's face was blank. He didn't look at his brother; instead, he said: "Kathy, leave us alone for a minute."

She looked back and forth at them. "What's wrong? What's happened?"

"Do as he says," Doug told her harshly.

"I won't! If anything's happened, I want to hear about it!"

"What do you say, Steve?" Doug's lip curled. "Want to talk about it here, now? In front of Kathy?"

"No."

She was trembling. "You can't shut me out now! I won't be shut out! I want to know the truth!"

"I'll tell you the truth!" Doug walked into the room and planted himself before the older man. "I'll tell you what he really is. My big brother!"

"Kathy, I beg you to leave," Steve Stryker said painfully. "I beg you. Please—"

"I won't! Doug, tell me—"

"All right! I'll tell you exactly, because I saw it for myself. With my own eyes! I saw him walk into Fletcher's office and shoot him down. Just like that. I saw him *kill*!"

Steve put his hand to his head.

"It's true, isn't it?" Doug's voice was fighting sobs. "You killed Fletcher, you and those others! And he wasn't the first one, was he? There was Molton, and Curtis, and Ergman, and Skade—"

"All right, Doug."

"Is it true?" Kathy's face was ghastly now in the candlelight.

"Yes."

Kathy screamed.

Doug said: "Why, Steve? For God's sake, why? What happened to you? What kind of business did you get mixed up in?"

For a moment, they had no answer. Then Steve Stryker said:

"We never wanted you to know. None of us wanted to be known. Not because it would hurt our plans—that was only *our* problem. But because it might involve *you*—our wives, our families—in the danger."

"What are you talking about?"

"I have to tell you the truth now. Much as it would be better to conceal it; there's no other way. I've been on a mission, and I'm afraid it's only beginning."

"A mission? What kind of mission?"

"To make you understand, I have to go back about a year ago. Back then, we first began to be aware of Their presence. It was easy at first; They weren't clever enough to conceal themselves. They made a mistake; They underestimated our abilities."

"They? Who is *They*?"

"We don't know where They come from, and They're not willing to talk about it. Most of the scientists doubt that They're from our own system, or even a system close enough to be observed by instruments. There's even one theory that says

They're mutants, products of our own planet, who have been waiting for this moment to take possession. I don't believe that's true; the very mistakes They've made indicate that They don't really understand the terrestrial mind."

Doug was staring, wide-eyed.

"Are you trying to tell me that *They* are men from Mars? Alien invaders?"

"Not Mars, Doug. But alien, yes. So alien, that it called for drastic tactics to overcome Them. We're not even sure that it will work."

His brother sat heavily in a chair, shaking his head.

"I don't understand. It doesn't make sense—"

"It didn't make sense from the beginning. But it's true. Do you remember the Firestone case, a year ago?"

"Sure. Some guy in the government, caught stealing plans. Spy stuff."

"But it was more than that. It was the investigation of the Firestone case that led to the discovery of the true facts. That there were *things* on Earth that didn't belong here, beings who had taken the form of humanity, but hadn't the *soul* of humans. Alien beings, Doug—crazy as it sounds. And they had thought they could possess this planet by the most direct means, through infiltration in the governments of the world.

"But the strategy failed. They were too overt about it; They

were too readily discovered. Their advance agents were captured, and questioned by chemical means to gain the true story of their purpose. When that purpose was revealed, we knew we were facing the worst threat in the history of man."

"An invasion?"

"Well, not a bloody invasion. They're not warmakers—They're not equipped for violence. They thought They could do it by more subtle means, by supplanting our present lawmakers and policy-setters with Their own people, until They could own everything, until They could call the Earth truly Theirs."

"But why?"

"We are not certain. But our best guess says They come from a dying world, a world where slavery is the core of Their existence. They could settle on other worlds; They have the scientific knowledge. But where else in the universe could They find so many willing servants?"

Kathy, listening in stunned silence, shivered.

"At any rate, we thought we had stopped Them in time. Through narcosynthesis, we had learned Their purpose and Their methods. But we also learned that They were capable of rectifying Their errors. That They had beings among Them who could do a far better job than the advance agents They sent to the planet. Beings whose powers could accomplish what the others failed to do."

"What kind of beings?"

Steve Stryker's face darkened.

"We knew there weren't many of Them; the agents told us that. Only a comparative handful, strange mutants that the race had developed over the centuries, creatures whose powers of mind were so great that They could conquer worlds."

"What do you mean? What could They do?"

"They could control you. Or me. Or Kathy. Or anyone, Doug. They could envelop your mind with Theirs—envelop it and persuade it to do as They wished. Once you were in Their grip, there was nothing that you wouldn't perform in Their interests. If They said Kill, you would Kill. If They said Die, you would Die. Imagine such a power, Doug—let loose on the world."

"I can't believe such a thing—"

"I can believe it. Because I saw it work. I saw what happened to the first government agents who tried to capture one of Them. They made the mistake of moving slowly, of using the due process of the law as we know it, the laws that apply to normal beings. They arrested one of these creatures, whose name had been supplied to us by the advance agents. The four men who made the arrest are dead now, Doug. Dead because they decided to die, apparently of their own volition. The four of them, one by one, leaped to

their death from the twentieth-story of a business building. And they were only the first victims of a long list of casualties."

"Then how can you stop such people?"

"We didn't know for a while. We had some factors on our side. We had informants, agents who would tell us *who* and *where*. We knew that these mind-controlling mutants were posing as business men, successful men whose financial powers were all part of the invasion program. They were no longer interested in taking over governments. They were using a more subtle—or perhaps more direct—method of gaining power. Through the control of economies.

"We knew who They were—but we didn't know how to stop Them. We knew that any attempt to utilize the law as we know it would end in failure and death. That's why we resorted to a different kind of law, a law that we have learned to hate and vilify, for good reason. But in this case, the only law that works."

"Jungle law," Doug whispered. "Gangster law—"

"Kill or be killed," Steve Stryker said. "We knew that we had to destroy Them suddenly, violently, quickly—that we had to end Their life before They could turn Their powers of mind upon us."

"Who is *us*?" Kathy said.

"A task force. A group of men hand-picked by top-echelon Gov-

ernment people to do the job. There are several hundreds of us operating in this country alone. We've been picked out of military files, mostly; a new type of commando, with only one mission. Murder."

Doug Stryker stood up. "I'm sorry to have learned about you, Steve; I didn't want any harm to come to you or Kathy."

"Harm?"

"Yes. But now that I know who you are, that you're one of these murdering butchers . . ."

"Doug!"

"No," Kathy whimpered. "Not you, Doug . . ."

"Yes, Kathy, me and a thousand like me. We're the Third Force of the invasion, and the most formidable. When our scouts fell into your hands, we sent our second force. When you began destroying them, we sent our third. You'll find us more difficult to deal with, for we shall be inhabiting the bodies of your own friends and loved ones . . ."

Kathy fell limply against Steve, who gripped her arms and stared with incredulous eyes at the younger man.

Then Doug said:

"Open the window, Kathy."

She hesitated, and then moved from her husband's side. She went to the window and raised it, admitting the city noises twelve stories below.

"Wider," said the thing inside Doug Stryker's body, and forced the young man's lips into a smile.

THE END

MOON GLOW

By G. L. VANDENBURG

That first trip to the moon has been the subject of many stories. Mr. Vandenburg has come up with as novel a twist as we've ever read.

And it could happen.

THE Ajax XX was the first American space craft to make a successful landing on the moon. She had orbited the Earth's natural satellite for a day and a half before making history. The reason for orbiting was important. The Russians had been boasting for a number of years that they would be first. Captain Junius Robb, U.S.A.F., had orders to investigate before and after landing.

The moon's dark side was explored, due to the unknown hazards involved, during the orbiting process. More thorough investigation was possible on the moon's familiar side. The results seemed to be incontrovertible. Captain Junius Robb and his crew of four were the first humans to tread the ashes of the long dead heavenly body. The Russians, for all their boasts,

had never come near the place.

The Ajax XX stood tall and gaunt and mighty, framed against the forbidding blackness of space. Captain Robb had maneuvered her down to the middle of an immense crater, which the crew came to nickname "the coliseum without seats."

Robb had orders not to leave the ship. Consequently, the crew of four scrupulously chosen, well-integrated men split into two groups of two. For three days they labored at gathering specimens, conducting countless tests and piling up as much data as time and weight would allow. Captain Robb kept them well reminded of the weight problem attached to the return trip.

Near the end of the third day Captain Robb contacted his far flung crew members over helmet intercom. He ordered them back

to the Ajax XX for a briefing session.

Soon the men entered the ship. They were hot, uncomfortable and exhausted. Once back on Earth they could testify that there was nothing romantic about a thirty-five-pound pressure suit.

Hamston, the rocket expert, summed it up: "With that damn bulb over his skull a man is helpless to remove a single bead of perspiration. He could easily develop into a raving maniac."

Robb held his meeting in the control room. "You have eight hours to finish your work, gentlemen. We're blasting off at 0900."

"I beg your pardon, Captain," said Kingsley, the young man in charge of radio operation, "but what about Washington? They haven't made contact yet and I thought—"

"I talked with Washington an hour ago!"

A modest cheer of approval went up from the crew members.

"Well, why didn't you say so before!" said Anderson, the first officer.

Robb explained. "It seems *their* equipment has been haywire for two days, they haven't been able to get through."

"How do you like that!" cracked Farnsworth, the astro-gator. "We're two hundred and forty thousand miles off the Earth and our equipment works fine. They have all the comforts of Earth down at headquarters

and they can't repair radio transmission for two days!"

The men laughed.

"Gentlemen," Robb continued, "every radio and TV network in the country was hooked up to the chief's office in Washington. I not only talked to General Lovett, I spoke to the whole damn country."

The men could not contain their excitement. The captain received a verbal pelting of stored-up questions.

"Did you get word to my family, Captain?" asked Kingsley.

"I hope you told them we're physically sound, Captain," said Farnsworth. "I have a fiancée that'll never forgive me if anything happens to me—"

"What's the reaction like around the country—"

"Have the Russians had anything to say yet—"

"Ha! I'll bet they're sore as hell—"

"Do you think the army would mind if I hand in my resignation?" Kingsley's remark brought vigorous applause from the others.

Captain Robb held up his hand for silence. "Hold on! Hold on! First of all, General Lovett has personally contacted relatives and told them we're all physically and mentally sound. Secondly, you'd better get set to receive the biggest damn welcome in history. The general says half the nation has invaded Florida for the occasion."

"Tell them we're not coming back," snapped Kingsley, "until

the Florida Tourist Bureau gives us a cut."

"Kingsley, the President has declared a national holiday. We'll all be able to write our own ticket."

"Yes," Anderson put in, "to hell with the Florida Tourist Bureau!"

Captain Robb said, "We'll be so sick of parades we'll wish we'd stayed in this God forsaken place."

"Not me," boasted Farnsworth. "I'm ready for a parade in my honor any old time. The sooner the better."

"Oh, and about the Russians," said Captain Robb, smiling. "There's been nothing but a steady stream of 'no comment' out of the Kremlin since we landed here."

"Right now," said Hamston, "it's probably high noon for every scientist behind the iron curtain."

"I wonder how they plan to talk their way out of this one?" asked Farnsworth.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to go on talking about the welcome we're going to receive, but I think we'd better take first things first. Before there can be a welcome we have to get back. And we still have work to do before we start."

"What about souvenirs, Captain?" asked Farnsworth.

Robb pursed his lips thoughtfully, "Yes, I guess there is a matter of souvenirs, isn't there."

The others detected a note of disturbance in the way the captain spoke.

Kingsley asked, "Is anything wrong, Captain?"

Robb laughed with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. "Nothing is wrong, Kingsley. The fact is we've taken on enough additional weight here to give us some concern on the return trip." He paused to study the faces of his men. They were disappointed. "But," he added emphatically, "I seem to remember promising something about souvenirs—and I guess a man can't travel five hundred thousand miles without something to show for it. I'll get together with Hamston and work out something. But remember that weight problem. First trouble we encounter on the return trip and a souvenir will be our number one expendable."

The crew was more than happy with Robb's compromise. Robb went into a huddle with Hamston, the rocket expert. When he emerged he informed the crew that each man would be permitted one souvenir which must not exceed two pounds. He allowed them four hours to find whatever they wanted. The men got back into their pressure suits and left the ship.

Captain Junius Robb stood outside the Ajax XX. His eyes scanned the great circular plain that stretched for fifty miles in all directions. The distant jagged rises of the crater's rim resembled the lower half of a gigantic bear trap.

The moon in all its splendor—

wasn't there a song that went something like that?—the moon in all its splendor, or lack of it was Robb's mute opinion. The scientists, as usual, were right about the place. To all intents and purposes the moon was as dead as The Roman Empire. True they had found scattered vegetation; there were even two or three volcanoes spewing carbonic acid, but they spewed it as though it were life's last breath.

Nothing more. The fires of the moon had given way to soft lifeless ashes.

Robb was glad he had allowed the men to look for souvenirs. After all, it wasn't a hell of a lot to ask for. A man could cut press clippings and collect medals and frame citations; and probably these things would impress grandchildren someday. But it seemed that nothing would be quite as effective as for a man to be able to produce something tangible, an authentic piece of the moon itself.

Captain Robb had always tried to be a humble man. He recalled an interview held by the three wire services a week before take-off. One of the reporters had asked the obvious question, "Why do you want to go to the moon?" He could have given all of the high sounding, aesthetic reasons, but instead his answer was indirect, given with a modest smile. "To get to the other side, I guess," he had told them.

Like the chicken crossing the

road, that was how simple and uncomplicated Robb's life had been. But now he stood, his feet spread apart, beside his mighty ship, a quarter of a million miles away from home. He was the first! And he could not fight back the feeling of pride and accomplishment that welled in him. The word "first" in this instance conjured up names like Balboa, Columbus, Peary, Magellan—and Junius Robb.

The crew members deserved the hero's welcome they would receive. They could have the banquets, parades and honorary degrees. But it was Junius Robb who had commanded the flight. It would be Junius Robb's name for the history books.

He wouldn't be needing any souvenirs.

Kingsley and Anderson were the first to return. They both carried small leather bags. Inside the ship they revealed the contents to Robb. He examined them carefully.

Kingsley had found an uncommonly large patch of brownish vegetation. He had torn away a sizeable chunk and placed it in the bag. "Who knows?" he shrugged. "I might be able to cultivate it."

"Or let it play the lead in a science fiction movie," snapped Anderson.

The first officer's bag contained a piece of one of the smaller craters. It had no immediately discernable value. It was Anderson's intention to polish it up

and put some kind of a metal plaque on it.

Four more hours went by and there was no sign of Farnsworth or Hamston. Robb began to worry. He'd never forgive himself if anything happened to either of the two men. He waited another half hour, then ordered Kingsley and Anderson to put on their pressure suits and go look for the two missing crew members.

The search was avoided as Farnsworth entered the ship dragging Hamston behind him.

"What happened!" yelled Robb.

Farnsworth began the job of getting out of his pressure suit. "I don't know. Hamston's sick as a dog. I checked every inch of his suit and couldn't find anything out of order."

Robb bent over the prone rocket expert. Hamston looked up at him with half-opened eyes and an insipid grin on his face. He mumbled something about "a fine state of affairs."

They removed Hamston's suit and placed his limp frame on a bunk. Robb examined him for forty minutes.

He reached the curious conclusion that Hamston was as fit as a fiddle.

The rocket expert fell asleep. Robb and the rest of the crew prepared to blast off.

The Ajax XX thrust itself through space, halfway back to its home planet.

The excitement of her crew

members grew with every passing second. In his concern over Hamston, Farnsworth had forgotten about his souvenir. He now opened his bag and displayed it before the others.

"What is it?" asked Kingsley.

"Dust!" was Farnsworth's proud reply.

"What the hell you going to do with dust?"

"Maybe you don't know it but this is going to be the most valuable dust on the face of the Earth! Do you realize what I can get for an ounce of this stuff?"

"What's anybody want to buy dust for?"

"Souvenirs, man, souvenirs!"

Farnsworth asked to see what Kingsley and Anderson had picked up. The two men obliged. For the next hour the three men and Robb discussed the mementoes and their possible uses on Earth.

Then Anderson said, "I sure wouldn't turn down about a gallon of good Kentucky whiskey right now!"

Robb laughed. "We did enough sweating on the way. You wouldn't want to sweat out the trip back on a bellyfull of booze."

"That may be a better idea than you think it is, Captain."

The four men turned to find Hamston sitting up on his bunk.

"Hamston!" Robb exclaimed, "how do you feel?"

"Terrible."

"What happened to you?" asked Kingsley.

Hamston stared at each man

(Continued on page 145)

CLEAR VIEW

By GEORGE WHITLEY

As you read this story, you'll be trying to figure out the twist ending. But you'll be wrong!

YOU'VE heard of the Flying Dutchman, of course. You've heard of old Captain van der Decken who, baffled by persistent head winds whilst trying to round the Cape of Good Hope, swore some oath so horrendously blasphemous that he was, as a punishment, doomed to beat about those stormy seas for all Eternity.

Quite a number of people claim to have seen the Flying Dutchman, one of the best authenticated sightings being by one of Her Britannic Majesty's ships of war—the Britannic Majesty being Victoria I—aboard which the late King George V was serving as midshipman. There has been, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no sighting reported in recent years. It could be that in these days of fast ships and navigational aids such as radar there have been no sightings. It could be that any captain or officer who has seen the phantom ship has kept his mouth shut,

fearing to be pilloried by the Press alongside the Flying Saucer fanatics.

I saw something myself in the South Atlantic not so long ago. I didn't report it. I feel safe in telling the story under a nom-de-plume, as a piece of fiction. Perhaps somebody who will be able to make use of the principle stumbled upon will read this. Perhaps there was no principle involved and the thing was only a ghost or an hallucination. After all, neither ghosts nor hallucinations show on the radar screen . . .

At the time I was chief officer of one of the Albion and Antipodes Line cargo liners, outward bound for Australian ports via Las Palmas and Cape Town. She was a new ship, well fitted. She had gyro compass and automatic steering, radar, and a clear view screen in each of the two wing windows of the wheelhouse.

It might be as well to describe what a clear view screen is, as

it is one piece of maritime gadgetry that seems to have received very little publicity. A clear view screen is a disc of thick glass which is rotated at high speed by a little electric motor. Any rain, spray, sleet or snow is swept out to the rim of the disc by centrifugal force, so that even when all the wheelhouse windows are practically opaque a clear view is still possible through the screen.

Anyhow, we were a few days out from Las Palmas and getting well to the south'ard. It was mucky weather—chilly, with a force four to five westerly breeze bringing in with it all the drizzle of the South Atlantic. Now and again the drizzle would be more like fog than drizzle, now and again it would turn to really heavy rain.

The Albion and Antipodes Line is one of those old-fashioned concerns that insists that even though the fourth officer is qualified to stand a watch on the bridge of *Queen Mary*, the four to eight watch is the chief officer's watch. Like many such rules, this one is honored more in the breach than the observance—provided that the weather is clear and that the vessel is not coasting.

This afternoon the weather was not clear—although it was not thick enough to demand the master's presence on the bridge. So, somewhat disgruntled—there was the usual backlog of clerical work demanding atten-

tion—I pulled on a raincoat and went up to the bridge at 1600 hours. I looked at the chart, saw the pencilled cross where the second officer thought that the ship was. His guess was as good as anybody's. I looked, too, at the crosses marking the positions of the ships that had been sending synoptic weather reports. There was little likelihood that we should be sighting any of them for a watch or two. Even so, it's not every vessel that tells the world all about her weather at six hourly intervals.

Rather sulkily I walked up and down the starboard wing of the bridge, the fourth doing the same on his side. It was the sort of day to make one sulky—gray sea and gray sky and the wind as cold and clammy as the fingers of a long drowned corpse.

With the wind came streamers of gray mist, drifting patches, nothing more. It did not reduce visibility sufficiently so as to make the taking of all precautions necessary, but it would have been foolish not to have made use of the radar. I told the fourth to switch it on. When it was in operation I came into the wheelhouse, looked at the screen. There was nothing to be seen but sea clutter—the reflection of our radio pulses from the crests of waves.

Then came the rain—torrential and icy cold. It drove me into the wheelhouse. I switched on the starboard clear view screen and peered through it, steadying myself against the

lurching of the ship with both hands on the window frame. I remember thinking at the time what an uncomfortable motion it was, a pitch and a roll combined with absolutely no rhythm to it at all.

Then . . .

I saw her then, almost ahead, fine on the starboard bow, crossing from starboard to port. She was that rarity in these days of steam—a sailing vessel. But I was not concerned with how she was rigged or how she was propelled—the matter of pressing urgency was the avoidance of collision.

I remember thinking, as I jumped for the wheel, that I should not have left it on automatic, that I should have had a man steering. Even so, it was only a second's work to throw the lever to manual, to spin the wheel hard over to starboard. Through the port clear view screen I saw that I had taken action in time, that we should pass astern—although not very far astern—of the other ship.

I ran out to the port wing of the bridge to see what sort of vessel it was that we had almost rammed.

I saw . . . nothing.

And the fourth officer, when I questioned him, swore that he had seen nothing on the radar screen.

So, you say, I saw the Flying Dutchman.

I've got my own ideas on the subject, however.

Look at it this way. You have a disc of . . . of anything, and you spin it at umpteen revolutions a second. What have you got? I'll tell you—you've got a gyroscope. What are its properties? You'll know the one about rigidity in space, of course—but I doubt if you'll know the other, although it's a very important one. I'll tell you, in one word. Precession. A gyroscope will precess at right angles to an applied force in the direction of rotation. Just imagine that spinning wheel again. You press down on one end of the axle. It will refuse to go the way you want it to, but it will swing either to the left or to the right.

The fast spinning disc of a clear view screen can't precess—it's too rigidly mounted—no matter what forces are applied to it by the motion of the ship. It can't precess in any of the three dimensions, that is . . .

But what about the others?

There was precession, I think—precession in that dimension, at right angles to all the dimensions of our familiar world, known as Time. I saw a ship—but it was not a ship of the here and now.

And it was not, I insist, old van der Decken's command. There was only one mast, and no built-up stern-castle.

It was more like a galley than anything else, and it had just one big, square sail.

And Hanno, the Carthaginian, circumnavigated Africa in 500 B.C.

THE END

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE AEC

By DR. ARTHUR BARRON

The Atomic Energy Commission has been the target of a great deal of criticism lately. Dr. Barron sets down, this month, a bill of particulars. Some of his accusations point to serious consequences if something is not done.

AT PRESENT the atomic energy commission of the United States has three glaring defects. It suffers from excessive secrecy; it drags its heels on the development of peacetime nuclear power; its organizational structure is cumbersome and inefficient.

The seriousness of these defects cannot be exaggerated. The Commission has two awesome responsibilities. It must provide the nation with an atomic capability sufficient to deter or to repel aggression. It must realize the exciting promise of nuclear technology. In meeting these responsibilities the Commission spends over two and a half billion dollars yearly. It administers a 17 billion dollar investment in plant and equipment. It employs 7,000 highly skilled people. In

one form or another it supervises 118,000 workers involved in nuclear industry. It is in direct military, economic, and political competition with the Soviet Union. Inescapably, its defects diminish the national security.

Information Please

In the early 40's the Office of War Censorship requested the newspapers to avoid the whole area of radioactivity. The mentioning of uranium was specifically forbidden. It was hoped that this policy of extreme secretiveness would be relaxed in the postwar period. Instead, it was intensified. In an unprecedented move Congress gave the atomic energy commission an airtight monopoly on all information pertaining to atomic energy. It established

a special classification — “restricted data” — and announced that all atomic information was “born” classified. No information in the entire atomic realm was to be released without the express approval of the Commission. No procedures or limitations were set. Unlike the military or executive branches, the AEC was to operate entirely without restraint in the information area. All censorship originated with it.

The results were (and are) disastrous. The Commission has exerted a stranglehold on information. Representative Chet Holifield, Chairman of the Special Congressional Subcommittee on Atomic Energy was not exaggerating when he indicated that “You literally have to squeeze information out of the AEC.” Since 1946 the Commission has been following an information policy which denies vital data to science, withholds much needed information from industry, antagonizes our allies, and misleads the American public.

The Scientists Complain

Scientists have voiced the loudest disapproval. In 1956 special congressional hearings were held on the problem. Without exception the scientific community castigated the AEC clampdown. Among the charges made were these: American physics textbooks are 10 to 15 years behind the times because of rigid security measures.

Scientific advancement has been retarded and scientists have actually been driven from crucial work. Needless and wasteful duplication of effort has resulted.

At least three shocking (and much hushed-up) cases came to light as a result of these hearings. In the summer of 1956 the electronics laboratory of MIT refused an assignment in the area of controlled thermonuclear reaction (the top secret “Project Sherwood”) because of excessive security demands. In another case Professor P. M. Morse of MIT, after considerable effort, independently discovered a new operations research technique in the area of “waiting line” theory. His results were published in a professional journal. Morse was subsequently informed, however, that the Navy had perfected the technique much earlier and had even made advances on it. But the naval results had been classified. In disgust Morse withdrew from the field. The Navy findings have not yet been declassified. In a third case Donald Hughes, senior physicist at Brookhaven Laboratories, reported that a thermonuclear process has been stamped “top secret” after publication in a British journal. That’s where it ended.

Science, as the scientists like to point out, is cumulative. It is difficult to see how it can accumulate knowledge under these conditions, however.

Fall-Out

If the scientists have been told only a little, the public has been told next to nothing. The AEC's policy on information about radioactive fall-out has been nothing less than shameful. Here is an area where the public especially needs to be informed. Its very survival is at stake. Ten years ago not a single human skeleton contained deposits of radioactive strontium. Today there is evidence that every human being carries strontium-90 literally in his bones. As a result of the 120 nuclear tests conducted since the war (an average of about 1 a month), background radiation in the world has increased by ten per cent. Geneticists claim this increases the likelihood of unfavorable mutations by a similar percentage.

In the face of this grave danger the AEC adheres to an inflexible and indefensible three-step information policy: (1) It suppresses the facts. (2) It stubbornly insists there is nothing to worry about. (3) It offers fake solutions. This process of misinformation can be observed in the AEC's handling of every case that has involved the fall-out issue:

. . . Suppression. On March 1, 1954 the AEC tested an H bomb at Bikini. Fall-out exceeded all expectation and contaminated 7,000 square miles of surrounding territory. Yet not

until February 15, 1955 — a year later — did the AEC release any of the facts about the fall-out to the American people. Also in 1955 the Commission refused to allow geneticist H. Mueller to go to Geneva to present his paper on the damaging effects of radiation.

. . . Denial of Danger. The AEC maintains that there is a genetic threshold for radioactive damage. The AEC insists that unless background radioactivity reaches a certain level (what this is it does not indicate), no harmful genetic effects are produced. This optimism is astonishing since the National Academy of Sciences states that "any radioactivity is genetically undesirable." Even natural radioactivity, it points out, results in a certain percentage of deaths by blood

. . . Fake Solutions. The AEC maintains it is working on a "clean bomb" as a solution to the fall-out problem. It neglects to point out that this does us very little good since the Russians will undoubtedly use dirty bombs. Also, (and this is treated by the AEC as top secret) it is unlikely we will use the clean bomb ourselves since the process involved drastically cuts explosive yield!

In 1954 an exasperated Congress sought to pry loose more information from the AEC by changing the rules of the game. Classification procedures were

liberalized. "L" clearances were introduced as a supplement to "Q" clearances. The latter require a full field check of many months duration and provide the individual with access to all information. The former require far less checking and provide the individual with access to limited information. In addition, the AEC was asked to declassify information not directly bearing on the weapons effort. Unfortunately, since discretion for all this still remains entirely within the Commission, little progress has been made. For example, it is estimated that 28,000 documents on reactor technology alone wait for declassification. An iron curtain of secrecy still stands between the AEC and the public.

Atoms for Peace

On three aspects of peacetime nuclear power there is universal agreement. Everyone readily admits: first, that there is a world wide need for electric power, especially in countries which are yet to be industrialized; second, that this need cannot be met by fossil fuels in many areas; third, that only nuclear fuel can do the job. Moreover, there is also general agreement that it would be political folly to allow the Soviets to fill needs in this area.

Here all agreement ends! When the discussion shifts from goals and needs to performance and methods, sharp clashes of opinion occur.

By and large the AEC is smug about its performance in the nuclear-power field. It claims nothing less than world leadership in reactor technology. As commission member Willard Libby, a scientist himself, puts it, "U.S. know-how places us in an absolutely commanding position in the atomic power developments of the future."

But the facts say otherwise! The Soviets, for example, plan a capacity of 2.5 million nuclear-powered kilowatts by 1960. U.S. plans call for only 1 million kilowatts by that year. Today, the U.S. has only one full scale commercial reactor (Shippingport, Pa.) This reactor went critical last May and produces a maximum of 60,000 kilowatts. Britain's Calder Hall reactor, however, commenced operations two full years before our own and produces more than 75,000 kilowatts. U.S. reactor technology, moreover, is largely confined to enriched uranium fuel processes. Little work has been done on natural uranium technology, though the foreign market's preference for this type of reactor is overwhelming. In addition, the U.S. industrial base for nuclear power is extremely narrow. To date, barely a half dozen U.S. concerns have become seriously involved in atomic power.

So seriously does Congress take the AEC's lagging in power development, it has done everything from forcing the Commission to take several mil-

lions more in appropriations than it requested this year to creating an all out "acceleration" program for reactor construction.

A Matter of Doctrine

The chief cause for the AEC's failure in the nuclear power field is its ultra conservative economic philosophy. The AEC stubbornly insists that private industry assume the major responsibility of developing peace time nuclear power. To all suggestions that the government share the burden, the Commission replies, "Socialism!" With 19th century single-mindedness, it demands that industry alone foot the bill, set the pace, and determine the size of the nation's peacetime nuclear power effort. The AEC sees its own contribution as almost solely research and development. Its attitude in this area is rigid.

No better evidence of this exists than the famous Dixon Yates deal. By agreeing to subsidize the Dixon Yates power plant at a cost of 4 million more per year than it would pay to TVA, the Commission unequivocally demonstrated its belief that privately produced power, no matter how expensive or inefficient, is better than publicly produced power, no matter how inexpensive or efficient. This devotion to the "free enterprise" slogan sometimes takes sublimely ridiculous forms. When pressed by Congress for a

five year projection of plans last April, for example, the Commission flatly refused to plan ahead for more than a single year on the grounds that a five year plan was "appropriate to Russia, not to the United States."

A Matter of Profit

But doctrine is one thing and reality is another. In this case the latter makes a shambles of the former. In the first place, private industry refuses to play bride to the AEC's groom. It wants no part of financing nuclear-power development. On the contrary, American businessmen definitely want subsidies from the government for its efforts. In a recent survey conducted by *Nucleonics*, the high powered trade journal of the nuclear industry, 90% of American businessmen polled felt it supremely important for the U.S. to be a leader in the field of nuclear power. 86% wanted their research work subsidized; 78% wanted their fuel costs subsidized; 57% even wanted their capital costs subsidized. In view of the fact that it costs 100 million dollars to carry any one type of reactor through the experimental to the prototype stage, this is not surprising.

The plain fact of the matter is that nuclear power is currently unprofitable, so private industry is just not buying. This is realistic. The nation simply has no internal need of

nuclear power at this time. Fossil fuel costs are fifty times cheaper and supplies are relatively plentiful. The power companies are not in the business of providing an unwanted commodity at ruinous costs to itself. In the face of this the AEC's insistence on 19th century economics is absurd. More than this, it is dangerous. In response to pressing cold war needs the best the AEC can do is mouth outmoded economic slogans.

Neither Fish Nor Fowl

Much of the Commission's trouble stems from its ambiguous structure. As matters now stand, it is entirely unclear precisely what kind of governmental agency it is supposed to be. It is clearly not a straight executive agency like the Post Office or Department of Agriculture. The President has the power of discretionary removal of personnel over these. He has no such power over the AEC. Nor is the Commission solely a quasi legislative and judicial agency like the FCC. It has similar powers, but it is mainly an operating agency with vast responsibilities in research and development.

The Commission has also recently suffered from the fact that its Chairman has occupied an ambiguous position. Lewis Strauss was simultaneously chairman of the AEC and special advisor to the President on atomic affairs. Since in the lat-

ter capacity he sat in on the highly confidential deliberations of the National Security Council, this double role made for confused lines of responsibility and communication. Sources within the AEC, for example, inform us that Commission members knew nothing ahead of time about Eisenhower's famous atoms-for-peace speech at the UN in 1953. Strauss helped engineer the affair as special advisor to the President without informing his colleagues on the Commission. Naturally, the latter were furious.

These confusions in structure lead to a number of serious problems. Of these, the most serious is the conflict of interest created within the Commission itself. Specifically, the AEC is torn between conflicting operational and regulatory demands. This can be seen most clearly in the bomb test issue. On one hand, the AEC is expected to press for the development of ever new and more terrifying weapons. Safety considerations in this context are secondary. At the same time, however, the AEC must evaluate the risks of fall-out. Here, safety considerations are uppermost. The conflict is obvious.

The problem inevitably shows up in other contexts as well. On August 8, 1956, for example, ground was broken in the construction of a Detroit Edison fast-breeder reactor in Michigan. The Commission was (and

is) anxious to get the reactor built as partial answer to criticisms of slowness in the nuclear-power field. But the reactor has not yet been completed. Nor is it likely it will be. Almost immediately there were charges brought by labor unions in the area and by other interested parties to the effect that the reactor would prove unsafe. Hearings on this charge are still going on.

There is legitimate reason for concern. The only previous fast-breeder reactor, an experimental one at Argonne Laboratory, accidentally "melted down" in 1955 and had to be disassembled. More important, the AEC's own Reactor Safeguards Committee wrote a report, the implication of which was that the proposed reactor might break down and spew the Detroit area with contamination. Again, this was a case of the AEC's right hand studiously not knowing what its left hand was doing.

This conflict of interest has had another serious consequence. As a result of it, the President receives briefing on nuclear matters which reflect only the official AEC point of view. Since the Commission has a monopoly on both atomic operations and regulatory activities, only "party line" scientists get through. There is no one in a position to present regularly a counter point of view.

An obvious solution to the problem would be to separate more clearly the licensing and regulatory functions from the operational activities of the AEC. Thus, a new agency, perhaps the Dept. of Health, would issue safety permits while the AEC kept responsibility for research, weapons development, and the like.

Excuses

Explanations can be found, of course, for the defects which exist in the work of the Commission. Since its creation in 1946 the AEC has been faced with several major problems. The cold war has understandably served to focus the Commission's energies on weaponry at the expense of peacetime activities. The Humphrey-Wilson budget balancing philosophy of government has curtailed needed expenditure. The Commission has had to expand enormously in a very short time and in the face of severe shortages of trained personnel. Finally, the profound complexities and the newness of the nuclear field itself have created their own pressures to add to those others.

Still, once these excuses have been made, a stubborn fact remains. Until its defects are corrected the AEC's nuclear effort must remain tragically less successful than it could (and must) be.

THE END

THE SPECTROSCOPE

by S. E. COTTS

43,000 YEARS LATER. *By Horace Coon. 144 pp. A Signet Book. Paper: 35¢.*

This is a book which just misses being fascinating by a tiny margin. The author does not fall short by much but the letdown is a keen one because so much seemed to be promised.

The book is in the form of an informal history of the Select Exploratory Mission written by the Official Scribe of the Great Galaxy. The SEC was sent to Earth in the year 45,000 to verify whether all life was extinct and if it was, to find out how and why this extinction occurred. Each of the three leaders of the SEC, Zoligus, Yundi, and Xia sent back exhaustive reports on the rise and fall of Earth's civilization as pieced together by archaeological methods. These reports would be used to decide whether Earth was suited for colonization by their species and whether it would be advisable to create Earthmen by laboratory methods.

In the beginning this results in some very unusual reading. But as one gets more into the book, the novelty wears off and each report seems merely too long and not at all credible as a piece of writing that takes place 43,000 years in the future. There are two good reasons for this. In the first place, Mr. Coon makes the character of each of the three writers so simple and so predictable that one can easily guess the rest of each report midway through. In the second place, he gives the characters twentieth century attitudes and then tries to convince the reader that the character got these by scientific means when actually he just stuffed the words in their mouths. There are many examples of this—one character feels a sinister force when walking through the ruins of what we know as Germany; another feels accumulated wisdom and patience when he explores what we know as China.

Yet the book weaves a spell and is to be recommended in spite of these faults because anything that gives us a perspective on the human situation today is well worth the time and effort even if it involves occasional tediousness.

THE SPACE EGG. *By Russ Winterbotham. 224 pp. Avalon Books. \$2.75.*

This novel has an illustrious ancestor. However it has not benefited from the example that was set before it.

The ancestor I speak of is Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, a classic by now, in which gray slugs from outer space plant them-

selves on the backs of humans and take control of their actions. In Winterbotham's book, china eggs from outer space penetrate the skin of humans and control their words and actions.

Not only is Heinlein's a superb story, but the characters catch hold of our sympathies from the very beginning. In *The Space Egg*, the characters are so stereotyped and so deadly dull that one doesn't care whether they escape from the menace that threatens them or not. One doesn't even care which guy gets the girl, so you can see how dull it must really all be.

ON AN ODD NOTE. By Gerald Kersh. 154 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

There is room for argument when one tries to pinpoint the exact quality that makes Gerald Kersh's work so distinctive, but there is no disagreement that his work is first class. He is a fine storyteller, a master of the most diverse moods—macabre, ironic, poignant.

On An Odd Note contains thirteen of his short stories, several of which are published here for the first time. None of them really belong in the science fiction category. It would not even be wholly correct to say that they are fantasy for much of the subject matter is not unusual. But any ordinary subject that he chooses to treat becomes extraordinary as soon as he sets down half a dozen words.



"Maybe we rubbed him the wrong way?"

...OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 7)

One comment I can make about the issues with novels that I couldn't make about those without them: all the shorts are good.

Chuck Cunningham
301 Ridgewood Dr.
Lexington, N. C.

● *The questionnaire in last month's issue should tell us how many readers are in favor of a novel in each issue, or not. If you haven't sent yours in get the issue and check off your preferences.*

Dear Editor:

You don't have many women readers, I'm sure. Hence, maybe you'll pay more attention to this letter than you ordinarily might. I just wanted to say that I missed Dr. Barron in the current issue. Your only excuse can be that you've got him off working on some especially good subject that required more than his usual care and skill.

Louise Dougherty

● *Dr. Barron is back in this issue. With a genuine scorcher, don't you think?*

Dear Editor:

Amazing has been around a long time and I would like to see it reach the top of the list of s-f magazines, but as long as you continue the present trend of juvenile stories it will never get there. You need some of the authors you had around 1953, such as Sturgeon, Sheckley, Matheson.

Bill Cook
2013 Oldham St.
Austin 5, Texas

● *We had the feeling that our novels have been very much on the adult side, Bill.*

Dear Editor:

Mr. Lanier's article on "Your Own Universe" was fine, but why switch horses in mid-stream? Dr. Barron's stuff was very good—even with not-so-interesting articles like "The Body Bank," which *Life* did better anyway. What's Dr. Barron got coming up?

Howard Cohen

● *We aren't switching horses. We just figure two good horses are better than one.*

Dear Ed:

Congratulations on your novel, "Parapsyche" in the August issue. It is obvious from the novel that you have more than a passing interest in parapsychology. You could have easily rewritten it as a report on the condition of parapsychology, and the type of reception ideas in this area get from most quarters.

Since I am hoping to be able to spend all my time in research in this area after I get my Ph.D., I am very glad to see you doing such an excellent, albeit disguised public relations job for the field.

Charles T. Tart
2811 Hillsboro Rd.
Durham, N. C.

- *We hope we'll be hearing more from you on this subject.*

Dear Ed:

People are always writing in for the old type stories that appeared in *Amazing* in the 30's and 40's. Now this is fine, there was many a good story appeared back then but s-f is like anything else, it will change with time. I would like to give an example: Quite a number of years ago H. G. Wells wrote a time travel story called "The Time Machine." Just recently Isaac Asimov wrote "The End of Eternity" also about time travel. Time travel has changed, hasn't it?

How come this guy Paul W. Fairman doesn't write as often as he used to? Too busy being an editor?

Just one complaint. I don't like this so-called novel each month, but I know I'm overruled.

Phillip Farr
2930 Main St.
Kansas City, Mo.

- *Very shortly, Paul W. Fairman will be writing more than he ever wrote before. Or so he tells us.*

Dear Editor:

I don't like the idea of putting *Amazing Science Fiction Novels* in the parent magazine. If I want to read a novel I'll buy a book. When I buy a magazine I want short stories that don't take long to read. As a rule the longer stories go unread longer by me than the short ones, so I have yet to read "The Space Egg." I'm sure I'll enjoy it when I get to it, if I do.

I wish you would use those other 16 pages to print a longer editorial, bring back an expanded Space Club, and print more short

...OR SO YOU SAY

stories. Also leave the back of the magazine the way it was in the February and March issues. It's less cluttered and looks better. The new is better than the old but there is still room for a lot of improvement.

Mike Barnes
Box 2003
Tyler, Texas

● *We'll try to keep on improving all the time, Mr. Barnes.*

Dear Editor:

I just finished the August issue and am happy to say that I enjoyed most of it. My favorite was the novel. I don't know why, but I seem to like this type of story. Of course there is probably no chance that this story could be the explanation of the after-life (if there is one) but it is a very interesting and captivating theory.

Let's have some more "Johnny Mayhem" stories or even a Mayhem novel.

Stuart Buchalter
50-12 204th Street
Bayside 64, N. Y.

● *News item: We've got a new series character coming up—Captain Dark—who's going to make a big splash. Watch for him.*

Dear Editor:

Alan E. Nourse's "Gold in the Sky" was very good. It isn't often you print a novel fitting in this category. As for the shorts, I haven't read them all, but I thought Godwin's was pretty outstanding so far.

I noticed in the August issue you mentioned something about a Classics Corner. Well, if this idea ever jells I'd like to nominate two of my favorites printed in *Amazing* in the early 40's: "It's a Small World" by Robert Bloch and "The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years" by Don Wilcox.

If you print novels like "Gold in the Sky" and "The Waters Under the Earth" in every issue you'll have my subscription in no time.

Michael Deckinger
85 Locust Avenue
Millburn, New Jersey

● *Your nominations for the Classic Corner noted and recorded. "The Voyage . . ." may be too long.*

AMAZING
STORIES

SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

THE PLANET SAVERS

By

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

ILLUSTRATOR NOVICK

A SHORT NOVEL

the planet savers

Marion Zimmer Bradley has written some of the finest science fiction in print. She has been away from our pages too long. So this story is in the nature of a triumphant return. It could well be her best to date.

BY THE time I got myself all the way awake I thought I was alone. I was lying on a leather couch in a bare white room with huge windows, alternate glass-brick and clear glass. Beyond the clear windows was a view of snow-peaked mountains which turned to pale shadows in the glass-brick.

Habit and memory fitted names to all these; the bare office, the orange flare of the great sun, the names of the dimming mountains. But beyond a polished glass desk, a man sat watching me. And I had never seen the man before.

He was chubby, and not young, and had ginger-colored eyebrows and a fringe of ginger-colored hair around the edges of a forehead which was otherwise quite pink and bald. He was wearing a white uniform coat,

and the intertwined caduceus on the pocket and on the sleeve proclaimed him a member of the Medical Service attached to the Civilian HQ of the Terran Trade City.

I didn't stop to make all these evaluations consciously, of course. They were just part of my world when I woke up and found it taking shape around me. The familiar mountains, the familiar sun, the strange man. But he spoke to me in a friendly way, as if it were an ordinary thing to find a perfect stranger sprawled out taking a siesta in here.

"Could I trouble you to tell me your name?"

That was reasonable enough. If I found somebody making himself at home in my office—if I had an office—I'd ask him his name, too. I started to swing my



The man in the mirror was a stranger.

legs to the floor, and had to stop and steady myself with one hand while the room drifted in giddy circles around me.

"I wouldn't try to sit up just yet," he remarked, while the floor calmed down again. Then he repeated, politely but insistently, "Your name?"

"Oh, yes. My name." It was—I fumbled through layers of what felt like gray fuzz, trying to lay my tongue on the most familiar of all sounds, my own name. It was—why, it was—I said, on a high rising note, "This is damn silly," and swallowed. And swallowed again. Hard.

"Calm down," the chubby man said soothingly. That was easier said than done. I stared at him in growing panic and demanded, "But, but, have I had amnesia or something?"

"Or something."

"What's my *name*?"

"Now, now, take it easy! I'm sure you'll remember it soon enough. You can answer other questions, I'm sure. How old are you?"

I answered eagerly and quickly, "Twenty-two."

The chubby man scribbled something on a card. "Interesting. In-ter-est-ing. Do you know where we are?"

I looked around the office. "In the Terran Headquarters. From your uniform, I'd say we were on Floor 8—Medical."

He nodded and scribbled again, pursing his lips. "Can

you—uh—tell me what planet we are on?"

I had to laugh. "Darkover," I chuckled, "I hope! And if you want the names of the moons, or the date of the founding of the Trade City, or something—"

He gave in, laughing with me. "Remember where you were born?"

"On Samarra. I came here when I was three years old—my father was in Mapping and Exploring—" I stopped short, in shock. "He's dead!"

"Can you tell me your father's name?"

"Same as mine. Jay—Jason—" the flash of memory closed down in the middle of a word. It had been a good try, but it hadn't quite worked. The doctor said soothingly, "We're doing very well."

"You haven't told me anything," I accused. "Who are you? Why are you asking me all these questions?"

He pointed to a sign on his desk. I scowled and spelled out the letters. "Randall . . . Forth . . . Director . . . Department . . ." and Dr. Forth made a note. I said aloud, "It is—*Doctor* Forth, isn't it?"

"Don't you know?"

I looked down at myself, and shook my head. "Maybe I'm Doctor Forth," I said, noticing for the first time that I was also wearing a white coat with the caduceus emblem of Medical. But it had the wrong feel, as if I were dressed in somebody else's clothes. *I* was no doctor, was I?

I pushed back one sleeve slightly, exposing a long, triangular scar under the cuff. Dr. Forth—by now I was sure *he* was Dr. Forth—followed the direction of my eyes.

"Where did you get the scar?"

"Knife fight. One of the bands of those - who - may - not - enter-cities caught us on the slopes, and we—" the memory thinned out again, and I said despairingly, "It's all confused! What's the matter? Why am I up on Medical? Have I had an accident? Amnesia?"

"Not exactly. I'll explain."

I got up and walked to the window, unsteadily because my feet wanted to walk slowly while I felt like bursting through some invisible net and striding there at one bound. Once I got to the window the room stayed put while I gulped down great breaths of warm sweetish air. I said, "I could use a drink."

"Good idea. Though I don't usually recommend it." Forth reached into a drawer for a flat bottle; poured tea-colored liquid into a throwaway cup. After a minute he poured more for himself. "Here. And sit down, man. You make me nervous, hovering like that."

I didn't sit down. I strode to the door and flung it open. Forth's voice was low and unhurried.

"What's the matter? You can go out, if you want to, but won't you sit down and talk to me for a minute? Anyway, where do you want to go?"

The question made me uncomfortable. I took a couple of long breaths and came back into the room. Forth said, "Drink this," and I poured it down. He refilled the cup unasked, and I swallowed that too and felt the hard lump in my middle begin to loosen up and dissolve.

Forth said, "Claustrophobia too. Typical," and scribbled on the card some more. I was getting tired of that performance. I turned on him to tell him so, then suddenly felt amused—or maybe it was the liquor working in me. He seemed such a funny little man, shutting himself up inside an office like this and talking about claustrophobia and watching me as if I were a big bug. I tossed the cup into a disposal.

"Isn't it about time for a few of those explanations?"

"If you think you can take it. How do you feel now?"

"Fine." I sat down on the couch again, leaning back and stretching out my long legs comfortably. "What did you put in that drink?"

He chuckled. "Trade secret. Now; the easiest way to explain would be to let you watch a film we made yesterday."

"To watch—" I stopped. "It's your time we're wasting."

He punched a button on the desk, spoke into a mouthpiece. "Surveillance? Give us a monitor on—" he spoke a string of incomprehensible numbers, while I lounged at ease on the couch.

Forth waited for an answer, then touched another button and steel louvers closed noiselessly over the windows, blacking them out. I rose in sudden panic, then relaxed as the room went dark. The darkness felt oddly more normal than the light, and I leaned back and watched the flickers clear as one wall of the office became a large vision-screen. Forth came and sat beside me on the leather couch, but in the picture Forth was there, sitting at his desk, watching another man, a stranger, walk into the office.

Like Forth, the newcomer wore a white coat with the caduceus emblems. I disliked the man on sight. He was tall and lean and composed, with a dour face set in thin lines. I guessed that he was somewhere in his thirties. Dr.-Forth-in-the-film said, "Sit down, Doctor," and I drew a long breath, overwhelmed by a curious, certain sensation.

I have been here before. I have seen this happen before.

(And curiously formless I felt. I sat and watched, and I knew I was watching, and sitting. But it was in that dreamlike fashion, where the dreamer at once watches his visions and participates in them . . .)

"Sit down, Doctor," Forth said, "did you bring in the reports?"

Jay Allison carefully took the indicated seat, poised nervously on the edge of the chair. He sat very straight, leaning forward only a little to hand a thick fold-

er of papers across the desk. Forth took it, but didn't open it. "What do you think, Dr. Allison?"

"There is no possible room for doubt." Jay Allison spoke precisely, in a rather high-pitched and emphatic tone. "It follows the statistical pattern for all recorded attacks of 48-year fever . . . by the way, sir, haven't we any better name than that for this particular disease? The term '48-year fever' connotes a fever of 48 years duration, rather than a pandemic recurring every 48 years."

"A fever that lasted 48 years would be quite a fever," Dr. Forth said with the shadow of a grim smile. "Nevertheless that's the only name we have so far. Name it and you can have it. Allison's disease?"

Jay Allison greeted this pleasantry with a repressive frown. "As I understand it, the disease cycle seems to be connected somehow with the once-every-48-years conjunction of the four moons, which explains why the Darkovans are so superstitious about it. The moons have remarkably eccentric orbits—I don't know anything about that part, I'm quoting Dr. Moore. If there's an animal vector to the disease, we've never discovered it. The pattern runs like this; a few cases in the mountain districts, the next month a hundred-odd cases all over this part of the planet. Then it skips exactly three months without increase. The next upswing puts

the number of reported cases in the thousands, and three months after *that*, it reaches real pandemic proportions and decimates the entire human population of Darkover."

"That's about it," Forth admitted. They bent together over the folder, Jay Allison drawing back slightly to avoid touching the other man.

Forth said, "We Terrans have had a Trade compact on Darkover for a hundred and fifty-two years. The first outbreak of this 48-year fever killed all but a dozen men out of three hundred. The Darkovans were worse off than we were. The last outbreak wasn't quite so bad, but it was bad enough, I've heard. It has an 87 per cent mortality—for humans, that is. I understand the trailmen don't die of it."

"The Darkovans call it the trailmen's fever, Dr. Forth, because the trailmen are virtually immune to it. It remains in their midst as a mild ailment taken by children. When it breaks out into the virulent form every 48 years, most of the trailmen are already immune. I took the disease myself as a child—maybe you heard?"

Forth nodded. "You may be the only Terran ever to contract the disease and survive."

"The trailmen incubate the disease," Jay Allison said. "I should think the logical thing would be to drop a couple of hydrogen bombs on the trail cities—and wipe it out for good and all."

(Sitting on the sofa in Forth's dark office, I stiffened with such fury that he shook my shoulder and muttered, "Easy, there, man!")

Dr. Forth, on the screen, looked annoyed, and Jay Allison said, with a grimace of distaste, "I didn't mean that literally. But the trailmen are not human. It wouldn't be genocide, just an exterminator's job. A public health measure."

Forth looked shocked as he realized that the younger man meant what he was saying. He said, "Galactic center would have to rule on whether they're dumb animals or intelligent non-humans, and whether they're entitled to the status of a civilization. All precedent on Darkover is toward recognizing them as men—and good God, Jay, you'd probably be called as a witness for the defense! How can you say they're not human after your experience with them? Anyway, by the time their status was finally decided, half of the recognizable humans on Darkover would be dead. We need a better solution than that."

He pushed his chair back and looked out the window.

"I won't go into the political situation," he said, "you aren't interested in Terran Empire politics, and I'm no expert either. But you'd have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know that Darkover's been playing the immovable object to the irresistible force. The Darkovans are more

advanced in some of the non-causative sciences than we are, and until now, they wouldn't admit that Terra had a thing to contribute. However—and this is the big however—they do know, and they're willing to admit, that our medical sciences are better than theirs."

"Theirs being practically non-existent."

"Exactly—and this could be the first crack in the barrier. You may not realize the significance of this, but the Legate received an offer from the Hasturs themselves."

Jay Allison murmured, "I'm to be impressed?"

"On Darkover you'd damn well better be impressed when the Hasturs sit up and take notice."

"I understand they're telepaths or something—"

"Telepaths, psychokinetics, parapsychs, just about anything else. For all practical purposes they're the Gods of Darkover. And one of the Hasturs—a rather young and unimportant one, I'll admit, the old man's grandson—came to the Legate's office, in person, mind you. He offered, if the Terran Medical would help Darkover lick the trailmen's fever, to coach selected Terran men in matrix mechanics."

"Good Lord," Jay said. It was a concession beyond Terra's wildest dreams; for a hundred years they had tried to beg, buy or steal some knowledge of the mysterious science of matrix mechanics—that curious disci-

pline which could turn matter into raw energy, and vice versa, without any intermediate stages and without fission by-products. Matrix mechanics had made the Darkovans virtually immune to the lure of Terra's advanced technologies.

Jay said, "Personally I think Darkovan science is over-rated. But I can see the propaganda angle—"

"Not to mention the humanitarian angle of healing—"

Jay Allison gave one of his cold shrugs. "The real angle seems to be this; can we cure the 48-year fever?"

"Not yet. But we have a lead. During the last epidemic, a Terran scientist discovered a blood fraction containing antibodies against the fever—in the trailmen. Isolated to a serum, it might reduce the virulent 48-year epidemic form to the mild form again. Unfortunately, he died himself in the epidemic, without finishing his work, and his notebooks were overlooked until this year. We have 18,000 men, and their families, on Darkover now, Jay. Frankly, if we lose too many of them, we're going to have to pull out of Darkover—the big brass on Terra will write off the loss of a garrison of professional traders, but not of a whole Trade City colony. That's not even mentioning the prestige we'll lose if our much-vaunted Terran medical sciences can't save Darkover from an epidemic. We've got exactly five

months. We can't synthesize a serum in that time. We've got to appeal to the trailmen. And that's why I called you up here. You know more about the trailmen than any living Terran. You ought to. You spent eight years in a Nest."

(In Forth's darkened office I sat up straighter, with a flash of returning memory. Jay Allison, I judged, was several years older than I, but we had one thing in common; this cold fish of a man shared with myself that experience of marvelous years spent in an alien world!)

Jay Allison scowled, displeased. "That was years ago. I was hardly more than a baby. My father crashed on a Mapping expedition over the Hellers—God only knows what possessed him to try and take a light plane over those crosswinds. I survived the crash by the merest chance, and lived with the trailmen—so I'm told—until I was thirteen or fourteen. I don't remember much about it. Children aren't particularly observant."

Forth leaned over the desk, staring. "You speak their language, don't you?"

"I used to. I might remember it under hypnosis, I suppose. Why? Do you want me to translate something?"

"Not exactly. We were thinking of sending you on an expedition to the trailmen themselves."

(In the darkened office, watching Jay's startled face, I

thought; God, what an adventure! I wonder—I wonder if they want me to go with him?)

Forth was explaining: "It would be a difficult trek. You know what the Hellers are like. Still, you used to climb mountains, as a hobby, before you went into Medical—"

"I outgrew the childishness of hobbies many years ago, sir," Jay said stiffly.

"We'd get you the best guides we could, Terran and Darkovan. But they couldn't do the one thing you can do. You *know* the trailmen, Jay. You might be able to persuade them to do the one thing they've never done before."

"What's that?" Jay Allison sounded suspicious.

"Come out of the mountains. Send us volunteers—blood donors—we might, if we had enough blood to work on, be able to isolate the right fraction, and synthesize it, in time to prevent the epidemic from really taking hold. Jay, it's a tough mission and it's dangerous as all hell, but somebody's got to do it, and I'm afraid you're the only qualified man."

"I like my first suggestion better. Bomb the trailmen—and the Hellers—right off the planet." Jay's face was set in lines of loathing, which he controlled after a minute, and said, "I—I didn't mean that. Theoretically I can see the necessity, only—" he stopped and swallowed.

"Please say what you were going to say."

"I wonder if I am as well qualified as you think? No—don't interrupt—I find the natives of Darkover distasteful, even the humans. As for the trailmen—"

(I was getting mad and impatient. I whispered to Forth in the darkness, "Shut the damn film off! You couldn't send *that* guy on an errand like *that*! I'd rather—"

(Forth snapped, "Shut up and listen!"

(I shut up and the film continued to repeat.)

Jay Allison was not acting. He was pained and disgusted. Forth wouldn't let him finish his explanation of why he had refused even to teach in the Medical college established for Darkovans by the Terran empire. He interrupted, and he sounded irritated.

"We know all that. It evidently never occurred to you, Jay, that it's an inconvenience to us—that all this vital knowledge should lie, purely by accident, in the hands of the one man who's too damned stubborn to use it?"

Jay didn't move an eyelash, where I would have squirmed, "I have always been aware of that, Doctor."

Forth drew a long breath. "I'll concede you're not suitable at the moment, Jay. But what do you know of applied psychodynamics?"

"Very little, I'm sorry to say." Allison didn't sound sorry, though. He sounded bored to

death with the whole conversation.

"May I be blunt—and personal?"

"Please do. I'm not at all sensitive."

"Basically, then, Doctor Allison, a person as contained and repressed as yourself usually has a clearly defined subsidiary personality. In neurotic individuals this complex of personality traits sometimes splits off, and we get a syndrome known as multiple, or alternate personality."

"I've scanned a few of the classic cases. Wasn't there a woman with four separate personalities?"

"Exactly. However, you aren't neurotic, and ordinarily there would not be the slightest chance of your repressed alternate taking over your personality."

"Thank you," Jay murmured ironically, "I'd be losing sleep over that."

"Nevertheless I presume you *do* have such a subsidiary personality, although he would normally never manifest. This subsidiary—let's call him Jay,—would embody all the characteristics which you repress. He would be gregarious, where you are retiring and studious; adventurous where you are cautious; talkative while you are taciturn; he would perhaps enjoy action for its own sake, while you exercise faithfully in the gymnasium only for your health's sake; and he might even remember the trailmen with pleasure rather than dislike."

"In short—a blend of all the undesirable characteristics?"

"One could put it that way. Certainly he would be a blend of all the characteristics which you, Jay, consider undesirable. But—if released by hypnotism and suggestion, he might be suitable for the job in hand."

"But how do you know I actually have such an—alternate?"

"I don't. But it's a good guess. Most repressed—" Forth coughed and amended, "most *disciplined* personalities possess such a suppressed secondary personality. Don't you occasionally—rather rarely—find yourself doing things which are entirely out of character for you?"

I could almost feel Allison taking it in, as he confessed, "Well—yes. For instance—the other day—although I dress conservatively at all times—" he glanced at his uniform coat, "I found myself buying—" he stopped again and his face went an unlovely terra-cotta color as he finally mumbled, "a flowered red sports shirt."

Sitting in the dark I felt vaguely sorry for the poor gawk, disturbed by, ashamed of the only human impulses he ever had. On the screen Allison frowned fiercely, "A crazy impulse."

"You could say that, or say it was an action of the suppressed Jay. How about it, Allison? You may be the only Terran on Darkover, maybe the only human, who could get into a trailman's Nest without being murdered."

"Sir—as a citizen of the Empire, I don't have any choice, do I?"

"Jay, look," Forth said, and I felt him trying to reach through the barricade and touch, really touch that cold contained young man, "we couldn't *order* any man to do anything like this. Aside from the ordinary dangers, it could destroy your personal balance, maybe permanently. I'm asking you to volunteer something above and beyond the call of duty. Man to man—what do you say?"

I would have been moved by his words. Even at secondhand I was moved by them. Jay Allison looked at the floor, and I saw him twist his long well-kept surgeon's hands and crack the knuckles with an odd gesture. Finally he said, "I haven't any choice either way, Doctor. I'll take the chance. I'll go to the trailmen."

The screen went dark again and Forth flicked the light on. He said, "Well?"

I gave it back, in his own intonation, "Well?" and was exasperated to find that I was twisting my own knuckles in the nervous gesture of Allison's painful decision. I jerked them apart and got up.

"I suppose it didn't work, with that cold fish, and you decided to come to me instead? Sure, I'll go to the trailmen for you. Not with that Allison—I wouldn't go anywhere with that guy—but I speak the trailmen's

language, and without hypnosis either."

Forth was staring at me. "So you've remembered that?"

"Hell, yes," I said, "my dad crashed in the Hellers, and a band of trailmen found me, half dead. I lived there until I was about fifteen, then their Old-One decided I was too human for them, and they took me out through Dammerung Pass and arranged to have me brought here. Sure, it's all coming back now. I spent five years in the Spacemen's Orphanage, then I went to work taking Terran tourists on hunting parties and so on, because I liked being around the mountains. I—" I stopped. Forth was staring at me.

"You think you'd like this job?"

"It would be tough," I said, considering. "The People of the Sky—" (using the trailmen's name for themselves) "—don't like outsiders, but they might be persuaded. The worst part would be getting there. The plane, or the 'copter, isn't built that can get through the crosswinds around the Hellers and land inside them. We'd have to go on foot, all the way from Carthon. I'd need professional climbers—mountaineers."

"Then you don't share Allison's attitude?"

"Dammit, don't insult me!" I discovered that I was on my feet again, pacing the office restlessly. Forth stared and mused aloud, "What's personality any-

way? A mask of emotions, superimposed on the body and the intellect. Change the point of view, change the emotions and desires, and even with the same body and the same past experiences, you have a new man."

I swung round in mid-step. A new and terrible suspicion, too monstrous to name, was creeping up on me. Forth touched a button and the face of Jay Allison, immobile, appeared on the visionscreen. Forth put a mirror in my hand. He said, "Jason Allison, look at yourself."

I looked.

"No," I said. And again, "No. No. No."

Forth didn't argue. He pointed, with a stubby finger. "Look—" he moved the finger as he spoke, "height of forehead. Set of cheekbones. Your eyebrows look different, and your mouth, because the expression is different. But bony structure—the nose, the chin—"

I heard myself make a queer sound; dashed the mirror to the floor. He grabbed my forearm. "Steady, man!"

I found a scrap of my voice. It didn't sound like Allison's. "Then I'm—Jay₂? Jay Allison with amnesia?"

"Not exactly." Forth mopped his forehead with an immaculate sleeve and it came away damp with sweat, "No—not Jay Allison as I know him!" He drew a long breath. "And sit down. Whoever you are, sit *down*!"

I sat. Gingerly. Not sure.

"But the man Jay might have been, given a different temperamental bias. I'd say—the man Jay Allison started out to be. The man he *refused* to be. Within his subconscious, he built up barriers against a whole series of memories, and the subliminal threshold—"

"Doc, I don't understand the psycho talk."

Forth stared. "And you do remember the trailmen's language. I thought so. Allison's personality is suppressed in you, as yours was in him."

"One thing, Doc. I don't know a thing about blood fractions or epidemics. My half of the personality didn't study medicine." I took up the mirror again and broodingly studied the face there. The high thin cheeks, high forehead shaded by coarse dark hair which Jay Allison had slicked down now heavily rumpled. I still didn't think I looked anything like the doctor. Our voices were nothing alike either; his had been pitched rather high, falsetto. My own, as nearly as I could judge, was a full octave deeper, and more resonant. Yet they issued from the same vocal chords, unless Forth was having a reasonless, macabre joke.

"Did I honest-to-God study medicine? It's the last thing I'd think about. It's an honest trade, I guess, but I've never been that intellectual."

"You—or rather, Jay Allison is a specialist in Darkovan parasitology, as well as a very com-

petent surgeon." Forth was sitting with his chin in his hands, watching me intently. He scowled and said, "If anything, the physical change is more startling than the other. I wouldn't have recognized you."

"That tallies with me. I don't recognize myself." I added, "—and the queer thing is, I didn't even *like* Jay Allison, to put it mildly. If he—I can't say *he*, can I?"

"I don't know why not. You're no more Jay Allison than I am. For one thing, you're younger. Ten years younger. I doubt if any of his friends—if he had any—would recognize you. You—it's ridiculous to go on calling you Jay₂. What should I call you?"

"Why should I care? Call me Jason."

"Suits you," Forth said enigmatically. "Look, then, Jason. I'd like to give you a few days to readjust to your new personality, but we are really pressed for time. Can you fly to Carthon tonight? I've hand-picked a good crew for you, and sent them on ahead. You'll meet them there. You'll find them competent."

I stared at him. Suddenly the room oppressed me and I found it hard to breathe. I said in wonder, "You were pretty sure of yourself, weren't you?"

Forth just looked at me, for what seemed a long time. Then he said, in a very quiet voice, "No. I wasn't sure at all. But if you didn't turn up, and I couldn't

talk Jay into it, I'd have had to try it myself."

Jason Allison, Junior, was listed on the directory of the Terran HQ as "Suite 1214, Medical Residence Corridor." I found the rooms without any trouble, though an elderly doctor stared at me rather curiously as I barged along the quiet hallway. The suite—bedroom, miniscule sitting-room, compact bath—depressed me; clean, closed-in and neutral as the man who owned them, I rummaged them restlessly, trying to find some scrap of familiarity to indicate that I had lived here for the past eleven years.

Jay Allison was thirty-four years old. I had given my age, without hesitation, as 22. There were no obvious blanks in my memory; from the moment Jay Allison had spoken of the trailmen, my past had rushed back and stood, complete to yesterday's supper (only had I eaten that supper twelve years ago)? I remembered my father, a lined silent man who had liked to fly solitary, taking photograph after photograph from his plane for the meticulous work of Mapping and Exploration. He'd liked to have me fly with him and I'd flown over virtually every inch of the planet. No one else had ever dared fly over the Hellers, except the big commercial spacecraft that kept to a safe altitude. I vaguely remembered the crash and the strange hands pulling me out of the wreckage and the

weeks I'd spent, broken-bodied and delirious, gently tended by one of the red-eyed, twittering women of the trailmen. In all I had spent eight years in the Nest, which was not a nest at all but a vast sprawling city built in the branches of enormous trees. With the small and delicate humanoids who had been my playfellows, I had gathered the nuts and buds and trapped the small arboreal animals they used for food, taken my share at weaving clothing from the fibres of parasite plants cultivated on the stems, and in all those eight years I had set foot on the ground less than a dozen times, even though I had travelled for miles through the tree-roads high above the forest floor.

Then the Old-One's painful decision that I was too alien for them, and the difficult and dangerous journey my trailmen foster-parents and foster-brothers had undertaken, to help me out of the Hellers and arrange for me to be taken to the Trade City. After two years of physically painful and mentally rebellious readjustment to daytime living, the owl-eyed trailmen saw best, and lived largely, by moonlight, I had found a niche for myself, and settled down. But all of the later years (after Jay Allison had taken over, I supposed, from a basic pattern of memory common to both of us) had vanished into the limbo of the subconscious.

A bookrack was crammed

with large microcards; I slipped one into the viewer, with a queer sense of spying, and found myself listening apprehensively to hear that measured step and Jay Allison's falsetto voice demanding what the hell I was doing, meddling with his possessions. Eye to the viewer, I read briefly at random, something about the management of compound fracture, then realized I had understood exactly three words in a paragraph. I put my fist against my forehead and heard the words echoing there emptily; "laceration . . . primary effusion . . . serum and lymph . . . granulation tissue . . ." I presumed that the words meant something and that I once had known what. But if I had a medical education, I didn't recall a syllable of it. I didn't know a fracture from a fraction.

In a sudden frenzy of impatience I stripped off the white coat and put on the first shirt I came to, a crimson thing that hung in the line of white coats like an exotic bird in snow country. I went back to rummaging the drawers and bureaus. Carelessly shoved in a pigeonhole I found another microcard that looked familiar; and when I slipped it mechanically into the viewer it turned out to be a book on mountaineering which, oddly enough, I remembered buying as a youngster. It dispelled my last, lingering doubts. Evidently I had bought it before the personalities had forked so sharply apart and separated, Jason from

Jay. I was beginning to believe. Not to accept. Just to believe it had happened. The book looked well-thumbed, and had been handled so much I had to baby it into the slot of the viewer.

Under a folded pile of clean underwear I found a flat half-empty bottle of whiskey. I remembered Forth's words that he'd never seen Jay Allison drink, and suddenly I thought, "The fool!" I fixed myself a drink and sat down, idly scanning over the mountaineering book.

Not till I'd entered medical school, I suspected, did the two halves of me fork so strongly apart . . . so strongly that there had been days and weeks and, I suspected, years where Jay Allison had kept me prisoner. I tried to juggle dates in my mind, looked at a calendar, and got such a mental jolt that I put it face-down to think about when I was a little drunker.

I wondered if my detailed memories of my teens and early twenties were the same memories Jay Allison looked back on. I didn't think so. People forget and remember selectively. Week by week, then, and year by year, the dominant personality of Jay had crowded me out; so that the young rowdy, more than half Darkovan, loving the mountains, half-homesick for a non-human world, had been drowned in the chilly, austere young medical student who lost himself in his work. But I, Jason—I had al-

ways been the watcher behind, the person Jay Allison dared not be? Why was he past thirty—and I just 22?

A ringing shattered the silence; I had to hunt for the intercom on the bedroom wall. I said, "Who is it?" and an unfamiliar voice demanded, "Dr. Allison?"

I said automatically, "Nobody here by that name," and started to put back the mouthpiece. Then I stopped and gulped and asked, "Is that you, Dr. Forth?"

It was, and I breathed again. I didn't even want to think about what I'd say if somebody else had demanded to know why in the devil I was answering Dr. Allison's private telephone. When Forth had finished, I went to the mirror, and stared, trying to see behind my face the sharp features of that stranger, *Doctor* Jason Allison. I delayed, even while I was wondering what few things I should pack for a trip into the mountains and the habit of hunting parties was making mental lists about heat-socks and windbreakers. The face that looked at me was a young face, unlined and faintly freckled, the same face as always except that I'd lost my suntan; Jay Allison had kept me indoors too long. Suddenly I struck the mirror lightly with my fist.

"The hell with you, Dr. Allison," I said, and went to see if he had kept any clothes fit to pack.

Dr. Forth was waiting for me

in the small skyport on the roof, and so was a small 'copter, one of the fairly old ones assigned to Medical Service when they were too beat-up for services with higher priority. Forth took one startled stare at my crimson shirt, but all he said was, "Hello, Jason. Here's something we've got to decide right away; do we tell the crew who you really are?"

I shook my head emphatically. "I'm not Jay Allison; I don't want his name or his reputation. Unless there are men on the crew who know Allison by sight—"

"Some of them do, but I don't think they'd recognize you."

"Tell them I'm his twin brother," I said humorlessly.

"That wouldn't be necessary. There's not enough resemblance." Forth raised his head and beckoned to a man who was doing something near the 'copter. He said under his breath, "You'll see what I mean," as the man approached.

He wore the uniform of Space-force—black leather with a little rainbow of stars on his sleeve meaning he'd seen service on a dozen different planets, a different colored star for each one. He wasn't a young man, but on the wrong side of fifty, seamed and burly and huge, with a split lip and weathered face. I liked his looks. We shook hands and Forth said, "This is our man, Kendrick. He's called Jason, and he's an expert on the trailmen. Jason, this is Buck Kendrick."

"Glad to know you, Jason." I thought Kendricks looked at me half a second more than necessary. "The 'copter's ready. Climb in, Doc—you're going as far as Carthon, aren't you?"

We put on zippered wind-breaks and the 'copter soared noiselessly into the pale crimson sky. I sat beside Forth, looking down through pale lilac clouds at the pattern of Darkover spread below me.

"Kendricks was giving me a funny eye, Doc. What's biting him?"

"He has known Jay Allison for eight years," Forth said quietly, "and he hasn't recognized you yet."

But we let it ride at that, to my great relief, and didn't talk any more about me at all. As we flew under silent whirring blades, turning our backs on the settled country which lay near the Trade City, we talked about Darkover itself. Forth told me about the trailmen's fever and managed to give me some idea about what the blood fraction was, and why it was necessary to persuade fifty or sixty of the humanoids to return with me, to donate blood from which the antibody could be, first isolated, then synthesised.

It would be a totally unheard-of thing, if I could accomplish it. Most of the trailmen never touched ground in their entire lives, except when crossing the passes above the snow line. Not a dozen of them, including my foster-parents who had so pain-

fully brought me out across Dammerung, had ever crossed the ring of encircling mountains that walled them away from the rest of the planet. Humans sometimes penetrated the lower forests in search of the trailmen. It was one-way traffic. The trailmen never came in search of *them*.

We talked, too, about some of those humans who had crossed the mountains into trailmen country—those mountains profanely dubbed the Hellers by the first Terrans who had tried to fly over them in anything lower or slower than a spaceship. (The Darkovan name for the Hellers was even more explicit, and even in translation, unrepeatable.)

"What about this crew you picked? They're not Terrans?"

Forth shook his head. "It would be murder to send anyone recognizably Terran into the Hellers. You know how the trailmen feel about outsiders getting into their country." I knew. Forth continued, "Just the same, there will be two Terrans with you."

"They don't know Jay Allison?" I didn't want to be burdened with anyone—not anyone—who would know me, or expect me to behave like my forgotten other self.

"Kendricks knows you," Forth said, "but I'm going to be perfectly truthful. I never knew Jay Allison well, except in line of work. I know a lot of things—from the past couple of days—

which came out during the hypnotic sessions, which he'd never have dreamed of telling me, or anyone else, consciously. And that comes under the heading of a professional confidence—even from you. And for that reason, I'm sending Kendricks along—and you're going to have to take the chance he'll recognize you. Isn't that Carthon down there?"

Carthon lay nestled under the outlying foothills of the Hellers, ancient and sprawling and squat, and burned brown with the dust of five thousand years. Children ran out to stare at the 'copter as we landed near the city; few planes ever flew low enough to be seen, this near the Hellers.

Forth had sent his crew ahead and parked them in an abandoned huge place at the edge of the city which might once have been a warehouse or a ruined palace. Inside there were a couple of trucks, stripped down to framework and flatbed like all machinery shipped through space from Terra. There were pack animals, dark shapes in the gloom. Crates were stacked up in an orderly untidiness, and at the far end a fire was burning and five or six men in Darkovan clothing—loose sleeved shirts, tight wrapped breeches, low boots—were squatting around it, talking. They got up as Forth and Kendricks and I walked toward them, and Forth greeted them clumsily, in bad accented Darkovan, then switched to Ter-

ran Standard, letting one of the men translate for him.

Forth introduced me simply as "Jason," after the Darkovan custom, and I looked the men over, one by one. Back when I'd climbed for fun, I'd liked to pick my own men; but whoever had picked this crew must have known his business.

Three were mountain Darkovans, lean swart men enough alike to be brothers; I learned after a while that they actually were brothers, Hjalmar, Garin and Vardo. All three were well over six feet, and Hjalmar stood head and shoulders over his brothers, whom I never learned to tell apart. The fourth man, a redhead, was dressed rather better than the others and introduced as Lerrys Ridenow—the double name indicating high Darkovan aristocracy. He looked muscular and agile enough, but his hands were suspiciously well-kept for a mountain man, and I wondered how much experience he'd had.

The fifth man shook hands with me, speaking to Kendricks and Forth as if they were old friends. "Don't I know you from someplace, Jason?"

He looked Darkovan, and wore Darkovan clothes, but Forth had forewarned me, and attack seemed the best defense. "Aren't you Terran?"

"My father was," he said, and I understood; a situation not exactly uncommon, but ticklish on a planet like Darkover. I said carelessly, "I may have seen you

around the HQ. I can't place you, though."

"My name's Rafe Scott. I thought I knew most of the professional guides on Darkover, but I admit I don't get into the Hellers much," he confessed. "Which route are we going to take?"

I found myself drawn into the middle of the group of men, accepting one of the small sweetish Darkovan cigarettes, looking over the plan somebody had scribbled down on the top of a packing case. I borrowed a pencil from Rafe and bent over the case, sketching out a rough map of the terrain I remembered so well from boyhood. I might be bewildered about blood fractions, but when it came to climbing I knew what I was doing. Rafe and Lerrys and the Darkovan brothers crowded behind me to look over the sketch, and Lerrys put a long fingernail on the route I'd indicated.

"Your elevation's pretty bad here," he said diffidently, "and on the 'Narr campaign the trailmen attacked us here, and it was bad fighting along those ledges."

I looked at him with new respect; dainty hands or not, he evidently knew the country. Kendricks patted the blaster on his hip and said grimly, "But this isn't the 'Narr campaign. I'd like to see any trailmen attack us while I have this."

"But you're not going to have it," said a voice behind us, a crisp authoritative voice. "Take off that gun, man!"

Kendricks and I whirled together, to see the speaker; a tall young Darkovan, still standing in the shadows. The newcomer spoke to me directly:

"I'm told you are Terran, but that you understand the trailmen. Surely you don't intend to carry fission or fusion weapons against them?"

And I suddenly realized that we were in Darkovan territory now, and that we must reckon with the Darkovan horror of guns or of any weapon which reaches beyond the arm's-length of the man who wields it. A simple heat-gun, to the Darkovan ethical code, is as reprehensible as a super-cobalt planetbuster.

Kendricks protested, "We can't travel unarmed through trailmen country! We're apt to meet hostile bands of the creatures—and they're nasty with those long knives they carry!"

The stranger said calmly, "I've no objection to you, or anyone else, carrying a knife for self-defense."

"A *knife*?" Kendricks drew breath to roar. "Listen, you bug-eyed son-of-a—who do you think you are, anyway?"

The Darkovans muttered. The man in the shadows said, "Regis Hastur."

Kendricks stared pop-eyed. My own eyes could have popped, but I decided it was time for me to take charge, if I were ever going to. I rapped, "All right, this is my show. Buck, give me the gun."

He looked wrathfully at me for a space of seconds, while I wondered what I'd do if he didn't. Then, slowly, he unbuckled the straps and handed it to me, butt first.

I'd never realized quite how undressed a Spaceforce man looked without his blaster. I balanced it on my palm for a minute while Regis Hastur came out of the shadows. He was tall, and had the reddish hair and fair skin of Darkovan aristocracy, and on his face was some indefinable stamp—arrogance, perhaps, or the consciousness that the Hasturs had ruled this world for centuries long before the Terrans brought ships and trade and the universe to their doors. He was looking at me as if he approved of me, and that was one step worse than the former situation.

So, using the respectful Darkovan idiom of speaking to a superior (which he was) but keeping my voice hard, I said, "There's just one leader on any trek, Lord Hastur. On this one, I'm it. If you want to discuss whether or not we carry guns, I suggest you discuss it with me in private—and let me give the orders."

One of the Darkovans gasped. I knew I could have been mobbed. But with a mixed bag of men, I had to grab leadership quick or be relegated to nowhere. I didn't give Regis Hastur a chance to answer that, either; I said, "Come back here. I want to talk to you anyway."

He came, and I remembered to breathe. I led the way to a fairly deserted corner of the immense place, faced him and demanded, "As for you—what are you doing here? You're not intending to cross the mountains with us?"

He met my scowl levelly. "I certainly am."

I groaned. "Why? You're the Regent's grandson. Important people don't take on this kind of dangerous work. If anything happens to you, it will be my responsibility!" I was going to have enough trouble, I was thinking, without shepherding along one of the most revered Personages on the whole damned planet! I didn't want anyone around who had to be fawned on, or deferred to, or even listened to.

He frowned slightly, and I had the unpleasant impression that he knew what I was thinking. "In the first place—it will mean something to the trailmen, won't it—to have a Hastur with you, suing for this favor?"

It certainly would. The trailmen paid little enough heed to the ordinary humans, except for considering them fair game for plundering when they came uninvited into trailman country. But they, with all Darkover, revered the Hasturs, and it was a fine point of diplomacy—if the Darkovans sent their most important leader, they might listen to him.

"In the second place," Regis

Hastur continued, "the Darkovans are my people, and it's my business to negotiate for them. In the third place, I know the trailmen's dialect—not well, but I can speak it a little. And in the fourth, I've climbed mountains all my life. Purely as an amateur, but I can assure you I won't be in the way."

There was little enough I could say to that. He seemed to have covered every point—or every point but one, and he added, shrewdly, after a minute, "Don't worry; I'm perfectly willing to have you take charge. I won't claim—privilege."

I had to be satisfied with that.

Darkover is a civilized planet with a fairly high standard of living, but it is not a mechanized or a technological culture. The people don't do much mining, or build factories, and the few which were founded by Terran enterprise never were very successful; outside the Terran Trade City, machinery or modern transportation is almost unknown.

While the other men checked and loaded supplies and Rafe Scott went out to contact some friends of his and arrange for last-minute details, I sat down with Forth to memorize the medical details I must put so clearly to the trailmen.

"If we could only have kept your medical knowledge!"

"Trouble is, being a doctor doesn't suit my personality," I said. I felt absurdly light-heart-

ed. Where I sat, I could raise my head and study the panorama of blackish-green foothills which lay beyond Carthon, and search out the stone roadways, like a tiny white ribbon, which we could follow for the first stage of the trip. Forth evidently did not share my enthusiasm.

"You know, Jason, there is one real danger—"

"Do you think I care about danger? Or are you afraid I'll turn—foolhardy?"

"Not exactly. It's not a physical danger, Jason. It's an emotional—or rather an intellectual danger."

"Hell, don't you know any language but that psycho double-talk?"

"Let me finish, Jason. Jay Allison may have been repressed, overcontrolled, but you are seriously impulsive. You lack a balance-wheel, if I could put it that way. And if you run too many risks, your buried alter-ego may come to the surface and take over in sheer self-preservation."

"In other words," I said, laughing loudly, "if I scare that Allison stuffed-shirt he may start stirring in his grave?"

Forth coughed and smothered a laugh and said that was one way of putting it. I clapped him reassuringly on the shoulder and said, "Forget it, sir. I promise to be godly, sober and industrious—but is there any law against enjoying what I'm doing?"

Somebody burst out of the

warehouse-palace place, and shouted at me. "Jason? The guide is here," and I stood up, giving Forth a final grin. "Don't you worry. Jay Allison's good riddance," I said, and went back to meet the other guide they had chosen.

And I almost backed out when I saw the guide. For the guide was a woman.

She was small for a Darkovan girl, and narrowly built, the sort of body that could have been called boyish or coltish but certainly not, at first glance, feminine. Close-cut curls, blue-black and wispy, cast the faintest of shadows over a squarish sunburnt face, and her eyes were so thickly rimmed with heavy dark lashes that I could not guess their color. Her nose was snubbed and might have looked whimsical and was instead oddly arrogant. Her mouth was wide, and her chin round, and altogether I dismissed her as not at all a pretty woman.

She held up her palm and said rather sullenly, "Kyla-Raineach, free Amazon, licensed guide."

I acknowledged the gesture with a nod, scowling. The guild of free Amazons entered virtually every masculine field, but that of mountain guide seemed somewhat bizarre even for an Amazon. She seemed wiry and agile enough, her body, under the heavy blanket-like clothing, almost as lean of hip and flat of breast as my own; only the slender long legs were unequivocally feminine.

The other men were checking and loading supplies; I noted from the corner of my eye that Regis Hastur was taking his turn heaving bundles with the rest. I sat down on some still-undisturbed sacks, and motioned her to sit.

"You've had trail experience? We're going into the Hellers through Dammerung, and that's rough going even for professionals."

She said in a flat expressionless voice, "I was with the Ter-ran Mapping expedition to the South Polar ridge last year."

"Ever been in the Hellers? If anything happened to me, could you lead the expedition safely back to Carthon?"

She looked down at her stubby fingers. "I'm sure I could," she said finally, and started to rise. "Is that all?"

"One thing more—" I gestured to her to stay put. "Kyla, you'll be one woman among eight men—"

The snubbed nose wrinkled up; "I don't expect you to crawl into my blankets, if that's what you mean. It's not in my contract—I hope!"

I felt my face burning. Damn the girl! "It's not in mine, anyway," I snapped, "but I can't answer for seven other men, most of them mountain rough-necks!" Even as I said it I wondered why I bothered; certainly a free Amazon could defend her own virtue, or not, if she wanted to, without any help from me. I

had to excuse myself by adding, "In either case you'll be a disturbing element—I don't want fights, either!"

She made a little low-pitched sound of amusement. "There's safety in numbers, and—are you familiar with the physiological effect of high altitudes on men acclimated to low ones?" Suddenly she threw back her head and the hidden sound became free and merry laughter. "Jason, I'm a free Amazon, and that means—no, I'm not neutered, though some of us are. But you have my word, I won't create any trouble of any recognizably female variety." She stood up. "Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to check the mountain equipment."

Her eyes were still laughing at me, but curiously I didn't mind at all. There was a refreshing element in her manner.

We started that night, a curiously lopsided little caravan. The pack animals were loaded into one truck and didn't like it. We had another stripped-down truck which carried supplies. The ancient stone roads, rutted and gullied here and there with the flood-waters and silt of decades, had not been planned for any travel other than the feet of men or beasts. We passed tiny villages and isolated country estates, and a few of the solitary towers where the matrix mechanics worked alone with the secret sciences of Darkover, towers of glareless stone which

sometimes shone like blue beacons in the dark.

Kendricks drove the truck which carried the animals, and was amused by it. Rafe and I took turns driving the other truck, sharing the wide front seat with Regis Hastur and the girl Kyla, while the other men found seats between crates and sacks in the back. Once while Rafe was at the wheel and the girl dozing with her coat over her face to shut out the fierce sun, Regis asked me, "What are the trailcities like?"

I tried to tell him, but I've never been good at boiling things down into descriptions, and when he found I was not disposed to talk, he fell silent and I was free to drowse over what I knew of the trailmen and their world.

Nature seems to have a sameness on all inhabited worlds, tending toward the economy and simplicity of the human form. The upright carriage, freeing the hands, the opposable thumb, the color-sensitivity of retinal rods and cones, the development of language and of lengthy parental nurture—these things seem to be indispensable to the growth of civilization, and in the end they spell *human*. Except for minor variations depending on climate or foodstuff, the inhabitant of Megaera or Darkover is indistinguishable from the Ter-ran or Sirian; differences are mainly cultural, and sometimes an isolated culture will mutate in a strange direction or remain,

atavists, somewhere halfway to the summit of the ladder of evolution—which, at least on the known planets, still reckons *homo sapiens* as the most complex of nature's forms.

The trailmen were a pausing-place which had proved tenacious. When the mainstream of evolution on Darkover left the trees to struggle for existence on the ground, a few remained behind. Evolution did not cease for them, but evolved *homo arborens*; nocturnal, nystalopic humanoids who lived out their lives in the extensive forests.

The truck bumped over the bad, rutted roads. The wind was chilly—the truck, a mere conveyance for hauling, had no such refinements of luxury as windows. I jolted awake—what nonsense had I been thinking? Vague ideas about evolution swirled in my brain like burst bubbles—the trailmen? They were just the trailmen, who could explain them? Jay Allison, maybe? Rafe turned his head and asked, "Where do we pull up for the night? It's getting dark, and we have all this gear to sort!" I roused myself, and took over the business of the expedition again.

But when the trucks had been parked and a tent pitched and the pack animals unloaded and hobbled, and a start made at getting the gear together—when all this had been done I lay awake, listening to Kendricks' heavy snoring, but myself afraid to sleep. Dozing in the truck, an

odd lapse of consciousness had come over me . . . myself yet not myself, drowsing over thoughts I did not recognize as my own. If I slept, who would I be when I woke?

We had made our camp in the bend of an enormous river, wide and shallow and unbridged; the river Kadarin, traditionally a point of no return for humans on Darkover. The river is fed by ocean tides and we would have to wait for low water to cross. Beyond the river lay thick forests, and beyond the forests the slopes of the Hellers, rising upward and upward; and their every fold and every valley was filled to the brim with forest, and in the forests lived the trailmen.

But though all this country was thickly populated with outlying colonies and nests, it would be no use to bargain with any of them; we must deal with the Old One of the North Nest, where I had spent so many of my boyhood years.

From time immemorial, the trailmen—usually inoffensive—had kept strict boundaries marked between their lands and the lands of ground-dwelling men. They never came beyond the Kadarin. On the other hand, almost any human who ventured into their territory became, by that act, fair game for attack.

A few of the Darkovan mountain people had trade treaties with the trailmen; they traded clothing, forged metals, small

implements, in return for nuts, bark for dyestuffs and certain leaves and mosses for drugs. In return, the trailmen permitted them to hunt in the forest lands without being molested. But other humans, venturing into trailman territory, ran the risk of merciless raiding; the trailmen were not bloodthirsty, and did not kill for the sake of killing, but they attacked in packs of two or three dozen, and their prey would be stripped and plundered of everything portable.

Travelling through their country would be dangerous . . .

The sun was high before we struck the camp. While the others were packing up the last oddments, ready for the saddle, I gave the girl Kyla the task of readying the rucksacks we'd carry after the trails got too bad even for the pack animals, and went to stand at the water's edge, checking the depth of the ford and glancing up at the smoke-hazed rifts between peak and peak.

The men were packing up the small tent we'd use in the forests, moving around with a good deal of horseplay and a certain brisk bustle. They were a good crew, I'd already discovered. Rafe and Lerrys and the three Darkovan brothers were tireless, cheerful and mountain-hardened. Kendricks, obviously out of his element, could be implicitly relied on to follow orders, and I felt that I could fall back on him. Strange as it seemed, the

very fact that he was a Terran was vaguely comforting, where I'd anticipated it would be a nuisance.

The girl Kyla was still something of an unknown quantity. She was too taut and quiet, working her share but seldom contributing a word—we were not yet in mountain country. So far she was quiet and touchy with me, although she seemed natural enough with the Darkovans, and I let her alone.

"Hi, Jason, get a move on," someone shouted, and I walked back toward the clearing squinting in the sun. It hurt, and I touched my face gingerly, suddenly realizing what had happened. Yesterday, riding in the uncovered truck, and this morning, un-used to the fierce sun of these latitudes, I had neglected to take the proper precautions against exposure and my face was reddening with sunburn. I walked toward Kyla, who was cinching a final load on one of the pack-animals, which she did efficiently enough.

She didn't wait for me to ask, but sized up the situation with one amused glance at my face. "Sunburn? Put some of this on it." She produced a tube of white stuff; I twisted at the top inexpertly, and she took it from me, squeezed the stuff out in her palm and said, "Stand still and bend down your head."

She smeared the mixture efficiently across my forehead and cheeks. It felt cold and good. I started to thank her, then broke

off as she burst out laughing. "What's the matter?"

"You should see yourself!" she gurgled.

I wasn't amused. No doubt I presented a grotesque appearance, and no doubt she had the right to laugh at it, but I scowled. It hurt. Intending to put things back on the proper footing, I demanded, "Did you make up the climbing loads?"

"All except bedding. I wasn't sure how much to allow," she said. "Jason, have you eyeshades for when you get on snow?" I nodded, and she instructed me severely, "Don't forget them. Snowblindness—I give you my word—is even more unpleasant than sunburn—and *very* painful!"

"Damn it, girl, I'm not stupid!" I exploded.

She said, in her expressionless monotone again, "Then you *ought* to have known better than to get sunburnt. Here, put this in your pocket," she handed me the tube of sunburn cream, "maybe I'd better check up on some of the others and make sure they haven't forgotten." She went off without another word, leaving me with an unpleasant feeling that she'd come off best, that she considered me an irresponsible scamp.

Forth had said almost the same thing. . . .

I told off the Darkovan brothers to urge the pack animals across the narrowest part of the ford, and gestured to Corus and Kyla to ride one on either side

of Kendricks, who might not be aware of the swirling, treacherous currents of a mountain river. Rafe could not urge his edgy horse into the water; he finally dismounted, took off his boots, and led the creature across the slippery rocks. I crossed last, riding close to Regis Hastur, alert for dangers and thinking resentfully that anyone so important to Darkover's policies should not be risked on such a mission. Why, if the Terran Legate had (unthinkably!) come with us, he would be surrounded by bodyguards, secret service men and dozens of precautions against accident, assassination or misadventure.

All that day we rode upward, encamping at the furthest point we could travel with pack animals or mounted. The next day's climb would enter the dangerous trails we must travel afoot. We pitched a comfortable camp, but I admit I slept badly. Kendricks and Lerrys and Rafe had blinding headaches from the sun and the thinness of the air; I was more used to these conditions, but I felt a sense of unpleasant pressure, and my ears rang. Regis arrogantly denied any discomfort, but he moaned and cried out continuously in his sleep until Lerrys kicked him, after which he was silent and, I feared, sleepless. Kyla seemed the least affected of any; probably she had been at higher altitudes more continuously than any of us. But there were dark circles beneath her eyes.

However, no one complained as we readied ourselves for the final last long climb upward. If we were fortunate, we could cross Dammerung before nightfall; at the very least, we should bivouac tonight very near the pass. Our camp had been made at the last level spot; we partially hobbled the pack animals so they would not stray too far, and left ample food for them, and cached all but the most necessary of light trail gear. As we prepared to start upward on the steep, narrow track—hardly more than a rabbit-run—I glanced at Kyla and stated, "We'll work on rope from the first stretch. Starting now."

One of the Darkovan brothers stared at me with contempt. "Call yourself a mountain man, Jason? Why, my little daughter could scramble up *that* track without so much as a push on her behind!"

I set my chin and glared at him. "The rocks aren't easy, and some of these men aren't used to working on rope at all. We might as well get used to it, because when we start working along the ledges, I don't want anybody who doesn't know how."

They still didn't like it, but nobody protested further until I directed the huge Kendricks to the center of the second rope. He glared viciously at the light nylon line and demanded in some apprehension, "Hadn't I better go last until I know what I'm doing? Hemmed in between the

two of you, I'm apt to do something damned dumb!"

Hjalmar roared with laughter and informed him that the center place on a 3-man rope was always reserved for weaklings, novices and amateurs. I expected Kendricks' temper to flare up; the burly Spaceforce man and the Darkovan giant glared at one another, then Kendricks only shrugged and knotted the line through his belt. Kyla warned Kendricks and Lerrys about looking down from ledges, and we started.

The first stretch was almost too simple, a clear track winding higher and higher for a couple of miles. Pausing to rest for a moment, we could turn and see the entire valley outspread below us. Gradually the trail grew steeper, in spots pitched almost at a 50-degree angle, and was scattered with gravel, loose rock and shale, so that we placed our feet carefully, leaning forward to catch at handholds and steady ourselves against rocks. I tested each boulder carefully, since any weight placed against an unsteady rock might dislodge it on somebody below. One of the Darkovan brothers—Vardo, I thought—was behind me, separated by ten or twelve feet of slack rope, and twice when his feet slipped on gravel he stumbled and gave me an unpleasant jerk. What he muttered was perfectly true; on slopes like this, where a fall wasn't dangerous anyhow, it was better to work unroped; then a slip bothered no

one but the slipper. But I was finding out what I wanted to know—what kind of climbers I had to lead through the Hellers.

Along a cliff face the trail narrowed horizontally, leading across a foot-wide ledge overhanging a sheer drop of fifty feet and covered with loose shale and scrub plants. Nothing, of course, to an experienced climber—a foot-wide ledge might as well be a four-lane superhighway. Kendricks made a nervous joke about a tightrope walker, but when his turn came he picked his way securely, without losing balance. The amateurs—Lerrys Ridenow, Regis, Rafe—came across without hesitation, but I wondered how well they would have done at a less secure altitude; to a real mountaineer, a footpath is a footpath, whether in a meadow, above a two-foot drop, a thirty-foot ledge, or a sheer mountain face three miles above the first level spot.

After crossing the ledge the going was harder. A steeper trail, in places nearly imperceptible, led between thick scrub and overhanging trees, thickly forested. In spots their twisted roots obscured the trail; in others the persistent growth had thrust aside rocks and dirt. We had to make our way through tangles of underbrush which would have been nothing to a trailman, but which made our ground-accustomed bodies ache with the effort of getting over or through them; and once the

track was totally blocked by a barricade of tangled dead brushwood, borne down on floodwater after a sudden thaw or cloudburst. We had to work painfully around it over a three-hundred-foot rockslide, which we could cross only one at a time, crab-fashion, leaning double to balance ourselves; and no one complained now about the rope.

Toward noon I had the first intimation that we were not alone on the slope.

At first it was no more than a glimpse of motion out of the corner of my eyes, the shadow of a shadow. The fourth time I saw it, I called softly to Kyla: "See anything?"

"I was beginning to think it was my eyes, or the altitude. I saw, Jason."

"Look for a spot where we can take a break," I directed. We climbed along a shallow ledge, the faint imperceptible flutters in the brushwood climbing with us on either side. I muttered to the girl, "I'll be glad when we get clear of this. At least we'll be able to see what's coming after us!"

"If it comes to a fight," she said surprisingly, "I'd rather fight on gravel than ice."

Over a rise, there was a roaring sound; Kyla swung up and balanced on a rock-wedged tree root, cupped her mouth to her hands and called, "Rapids!"

I pulled myself up to the edge of the drop and stood looking down into the narrow gully. Here

the narrow track we had been following was crossed and obscured by the deep, roaring rapids of a mountain stream.

Less than twenty feet across, it tumbled in an icy flood, almost a waterfall, pitching over the lip of a crag above us. It had sliced a ravine five feet deep in the mountainside, and came roaring down with a rushing noise that made my head vibrate. It looked formidable; anyone stepping into it would be knocked off his feet in seconds, and swept a thousand feet down the mountainside by the force of the current.

Rafe scrambled gingerly over the gullied lip of the channel it had cut, and bent carefully to scoop up water in his palm and drink. "Phew, it's colder than Zandru's ninth hell. Must come straight down from a glacier!"

It did. I remembered the trail and remembered the spot. Kendrick joined me at the water's edge, and asked, "How do we get across?"

"I'm not sure." I said, studying the racing white torrent. Overhead, about twenty feet from where we clustered on the slope, the thick branches of enormous trees overhung the rapids, their long roots partially bared, gnarled and twisted by recurrent floods; and between these trees swayed one of the queer swing-bridges of the trailmen, hanging only about ten feet above the water.

Even I had never learned to navigate one of these swing-

bridges without assistance; human arms are no longer suited to brachiation. I might have managed it once; but at present, except as a desperate final expedient, it was out of the question. Rafe or Lerrys, who were lightly built and acrobatic, could probably do it as a simple stunt on the level, in a field; on a steep and rocky mountainside, where a fall might mean being dashed a thousand feet down the torrent, I doubted it. The trailmen's bridge was out . . . but what other choice was there?

I beckoned to Kendrick, he being the man I was the most inclined to trust with my life at the moment, and said, "It looks uncrossable, but I think two men could get across, if they were steady on their feet. The others can hold us on ropes, in case we do get knocked down. If we can get to the opposite bank, we can stretch a fixed rope from that snub of rock—" I pointed, "and the others can cross with that. The first men over will be the only ones to run any risk. Want to try?"

I liked it better that he didn't answer right away, but went to the edge of the gully and peered down the rocky chasm. Doubtless, if we were knocked down, all seven of the others could haul us up again; but not before we'd been badly smashed on the rocks. And once again I caught that elusive shadow of movement in the brushwood; if the trailmen chose a moment when we were half-in, half-out of the rapids,

we'd be ridiculously vulnerable to attack.

"We ought to be able to get a fixed rope easier than that," Hjalmar said, and took one of the spares from his rucksack. He coiled it, making a running loop on one end, and standing precariously on the lip of the rapids, sent it spinning toward the outcrop of rock we had chosen as a fixed point. "If I can get it over..."

The rope fell short, and Hjalmar reeled it in and cast the loop again. He made three more unsuccessful tries before finally, with held breath, we watched the noose settle over the rocky snub. Gently, pulling the line taut, we watched it stretch above the rapids. The knot tightened, fastened. Hjalmar grinned and let out his breath.

"There," he said, and jerked hard on the rope, testing it with a long hard pull. The rocky outcrop broke, with a sharp *crack*, split, and toppled entirely into the rapids, the sudden jerk almost pulling Hjalmar off his feet. The boulder rolled, with a great bouncing splash, faster and faster down the mountain, taking the rope with it.

We just stood and stared for a minute. Hjalmar swore horribly, in the unprintable filth of the mountain tongue, and his brothers joined in. "How the devil was I to know the *rock* would split off?"

"Better for it to split now than when we were depending on it," Kyla said stolidly. "I

have a better idea." She was untying herself from the rope as she spoke, and knotting one of the spares through her belt. She handed the other end of the rope to Lerrys. "Hold on to this," she said, and slipped out of her blankety windbreak, standing shivering in a thin sweater. She unstrapped her boots and tossed them to me. "Now boost me on your shoulders, Hjalmar."

Too late, I guessed her intention and shouted, "No, don't try—!" But she had already clambered to an unsteady perch on the big Darkovan's shoulders and made a flying grab for the lowest loop of the trailmen's bridge. She hung there, swaying slightly and sickeningly, as the loose lianas gave to her weight.

"Hjalmar—Lerrys—haul her down!"

"I'm lighter than any of you," Kyla called shrilly, "and not hefty enough to be any use on the ropes!" Her voice quavered somewhat as she added, "—and hang on to that rope, Lerrys! If you lose it, I'll have done this for nothing!"

She gripped the loop of vine and reached, with her free hand, for the next loop. Now she was swinging out over the edge of the boiling rapids. Tight-mouthed, I gestured to the others to spread out slightly below—not that anything would help her if she fell.

Hjalmar, watching as the woman gained the third loop—which joggled horribly to her slight weight—shouted suddenly,

"Kyla, quick! The loop *beyond*—don't touch the next one! It's frayed—rotted through!"

Kyla brought her left hand up to her right on the third loop. She made a long reach, missed her grab, swung again, and clung, breathing hard, to the safe fifth loop. I watched, sick with dread. The damned girl should have told me what she intended.

Kyla glanced down and we got a glimpse of her face, glistening with the mixture of sunburn cream and sweat, drawn with effort. Her tiny swaying figure hung twelve feet above the white tumbling water, and if she lost her grip, only a miracle could bring her out alive. She hung there for a minute, jiggling slightly, then started a long back-and-forward swing. On the third forward swing she made a long leap and grabbed at the final loop.

It slipped through her fingers; she made a wild grab with the other hand, and the liana dipped sharply under her weight, raced through her fingers, and with a sharp snap, broke in two. She gave a wild shriek as it parted, and twisted her body frantically in mid-air, landing asprawl half-in, half-out of the rapids, but on the further bank. She hauled her legs up on dry land and crouched there, drenched to the waist but safe.

The Darkovans were yelling in delight. I motioned to Lerrys to make his end of the rope fast



The rope swung perilously, threatening to dash her on the rocks.

around a hefty tree-root, and shouted, "Are you hurt?" She indicated in pantomime that the thundering of the water drowned words, and bent to belay her end of the rope. In sign-language I gestured to her to make very sure of the knots; if anyone slipped, she hadn't the weight to hold us.

I hauled on the rope myself to test it, and it held fast. I slung her boots around my neck by their cords, then, gripping the fixed rope, Kendricks and I stepped into the water.

It was even icier than I expected, and my first step was nearly the last; the rush of the white water knocked me to my knees, and I floundered and would have measured my length except for my hands on the fixed rope. Buck Kendricks grabbed at me, letting go the rope to do it, and I swore at him, raging, while we got on our feet again and braced ourselves against the onrushing current. While we struggled in the pounding waters, I admitted to myself; we could never have crossed without the rope Kyla had risked her life to fix.

Shivering, we got across and hauled ourselves out. I signalled to the others to cross two at a time, and Kyla seized my elbow. "Jason—"

"Later, dammit!" I had to shout to make myself heard over the roaring water, as I held out a hand to help Rafe get his footing on the ledge.

"This—can't—wait," she yell-

ed, cupping her hands and shouting into my ear. I turned on her. "What!"

"There are—*trailmen*—on the top level—of that bridge! I saw them! They cut the loop!"

Regis and Hjalmar came struggling across last; Regis, lightly-built, was swept off his feet and Hjalmar turned to grab him, but I shouted to him to keep clear—they were still roped together and if the ropes fouled we might drown someone. Lerrys and I leaped down and hauled Regis clear; he coughed, spitting icy water, drenched to the skin.

I motioned to Lerrys to leave the fixed rope, though I had little hope that it would be there when we returned, and looked quickly around, debating what to do. Regis and Rafe and I were wet clear through; the others to well above the knee. At this altitude, this was dangerous, although we were not yet high enough to worry about frostbite. Trailmen or no trailmen, we must run the lesser risk of finding a place where we could kindle a fire and dry out.

"Up there—there's a clearing," I said briefly, and hurried them along.

It was hard climbing now, on rock, and there were places where we had to scabble for handholds, and flatten ourselves out against an almost sheer wall. The keen wind rose as we climbed higher, whining through the thick forest, sighing in the rocky outcrops, and biting

through our soaked clothing with icy teeth. Kendricks was having hard going now, and I helped him as much as I could, but I was aching with cold. We gained the clearing, a small bare spot on a lesser peak, and I directed the two Darkovan brothers who were the driest to gather dry brushwood and get a fire going. It was hardly near enough sunset to camp; but by the time we were dry enough to go on safely, it would be, so I gave orders to get the tent up, then rounded angrily on Kyla.

"See here, another time don't try any dangerous tricks unless you're ordered to!"

"Go easy on her," Regis Hastur interceded, "we'd never have crossed without the fixed rope. Good work, girl."

"You keep out of this!" I snapped. It was true, yet resentment boiled in me as Kyla's plain sullen face glowed under the praise from the Hastur.

The fact was—I admitted it grudgingly—a lightweight like Kyla ran less risk on an acrobat's bridge than in that kind of roaring current. That did not lessen my annoyance; and Regis Hastur's interference, and the foolish grin on the girl's face, made me boil over.

I wanted to question her further about the sight of trailmen on the bridge, but decided against it. We had been spared attack on the rapids, so it wasn't impossible that a group, not hostile, was simply watching our progress—maybe even aware

that we were on a peaceful mission.

But I didn't believe it for a minute. If I knew anything about the trailmen, it was this—one could not judge them by human standards at all. I tried to decide what I would have done, as a trailman, but my brain wouldn't run that way at the moment.

The Darkovan brothers had built up the fire with a thoroughly reckless disregard of watching eyes. It seemed to me that the morale and fitness of the shivering crew was of more value at the moment than caution; and around the roaring fire, feeling my soaked clothes warming to the blaze and drinking boiling hot tea from a mug, it seemed that we were right. Optimism reappeared; Kyla, letting Hjalmar dress her hands which had been rubbed raw by the slipping lianas, made jokes with the men about her feat of acrobatics.

We had made camp on the summit of an outlying arm of the main ridge of the Hellers, and the whole massive range lay before our eyes, turned to a million colors in the declining sun. Green and turquoise and rose, the mountains were even more beautiful than I remembered. The shoulder of the high slope we had just climbed had obscured the real mountain massif from our sight, and I saw Kendricks' eyes widen as he realized that this high summit we had just mastered was only the first

step of the task which lay before us. The real ridge rose ahead, thickly forested on the lower slopes, then strewn with rock and granite like the landscape of an airless, deserted moon. And above the rock, there were straight walls capped with blinding snow and ice. Down one peak a glacier flowed, a waterfall, a cascade shockingly arrested in motion. I murmured the trailman's name for the mountain, aloud, and translated it for the others:

"The Wall Around the World."

"Good name for it," Lerrys murmured, coming with his mug in his hand to look at the mountain. "Jason, the big peak there has never been climbed, has it?"

"I can't remember." My teeth were chattering and I went back toward the fire. Regis surveyed the distant glacier and murmured, "It doesn't look too bad. There could be a route along that western *arête*—Hjalmar, weren't you with the expedition that climbed and mapped High Kimbi?"

The giant nodded, rather proudly. "We got within a hundred feet of the top, then a snowstorm came up and we had to turn back. Some day we'll tackle the Wall Around the World—it's been tried, but no one ever climbed the peak."

"No one ever will," Lerrys stated positively, "There's two hundred feet of sheer rock cliff, Prince Regis, you'd need wings to get up. And there's the ava-

lanche ledge they call Hell's Alley—"

Kendricks broke in irritably, "I don't care whether it's ever been climbed or ever will be climbed, we're not going to climb it now!" He stared at me and added, "I hope!"

"We're not." I was glad of the interruption. If the youngsters and amateurs wanted to amuse themselves plotting hypothetical attacks on unclimbable sierras, that was all very well, but it was, if nothing worse, a great waste of time. I showed Kendricks a notch in the ridge, thousands of feet lower than the peaks, and well-sheltered from the icefalls on either side.

"That's Dammerung; we're going through there. We won't be on the mountain at all, and it's less than 22,000 feet high in the pass—although there are some bad ledges and washes. We'll keep clear of the main tree-roads if we can, and all the mapped trailmen's villages, but we may run into wandering bands—" abruptly I made my decision and gestured them around me.

"From this point," I broke the news, "we're liable to be attacked. Kyla, tell them what you saw."

She put down her mug. Her face was serious again, as she related what she had seen on the bridge. "We're on a peaceful mission, but they don't know that yet. The thing to remember is that they do not wish to kill,

only to wound and rob. If we show fight—" she displayed a short ugly knife, which she tucked matter-of-factly into her shirt-front, "they will run away again."

Lerrys loosened a narrow dagger which until this moment I had thought purely ornamental. He said, "Mind if I say something more, Jason? I remember from the 'Narr campaign—the trailmen fight at close quarters, and by human standards they fight dirty." He looked around fiercely, his unshaven face glinting as he grinned. "One more thing. I like elbow room. Do we have to stay roped together when we start out again?"

I thought it over. His enthusiasm for a fight made me feel both annoyed and curiously delighted. "I won't make anyone stay roped who thinks he'd be safer without it," I said, "we'll decide that when the time comes, anyway. But personally—the trailmen are used to running along narrow ledges, and we're not. Their first tactic would probably be to push us off, one by one. If we're roped, we can fend them off better." I dismissed the subject, adding, "Just now, the important thing is to dry out."

Kendricks remained at my side after the others had gathered around the fire, looking into the thick forest which sloped up to our campsite. He said, "This place looks as if it had been used for a camp before. Aren't we just as vulnerable to attack here

as we would be anywhere else?"

He had hit on the one thing I hadn't wanted to talk about. This clearing was altogether too convenient. I only said, "At least there aren't so many ledges to push us off."

Kendricks muttered, "You've got the only blaster!"

"I left it at Carthon," I said truthfully. Then I laid down the law:

"Listen, Buck. If we kill a single trailman, except in hand-to-hand fight in self-defense, we might as well pack up and go home. We're on a peaceful mission, and we're begging a favor. Even if we're attacked—we kill only as a last resort, and in hand-to-hand combat!"

"Damned primitive frontier planet—"

"Would you rather die of the trailmen's disease?"

He said savagely, "We're apt to catch it anyway—here. You're immune, you don't care, you're safe! The rest of us are on a suicide mission—and damn it, when I die I want to take a few of those monkeys with me!"

I bent my head, bit my lip and said nothing. Buck couldn't be blamed for the way he felt. After a moment I pointed to the notch in the ridge again. "It's not so far. Once we get through Dammerung, it's easy going into the trailmen's city. Beyond there, it's all civilized."

"Maybe *you* call it civilization," Kendricks said, and turned away.

"Come on, let's finish drying our feet."

And at that moment they hit us.

Kendricks' yell was the only warning I had before I was fighting away something scrabbling up my back. I whirled and ripped the creature away, and saw dimly that the clearing was filled to the rim with an explosion of furry white bodies. I cupped my hands and yelled, in the only trailman dialect I knew, "Hold off! We come in peace!"

One of them yelled something unintelligible and plunged at me—another tribe! I saw a white-furred, chinless face, contorted in rage, a small ugly knife—a female! I ripped out my own knife, fending away a savage slash. Something tore white-hot across the knuckles of my hand; the fingers went limp and my knife fell, and the trailman woman snatched it up and made off with her prize, swinging lithely upward into the treetops.

I searched quickly, gripped with my good hand at the bleeding knuckles, and found Regis Hastur struggling at the edge of a ledge with a pair of the creatures. The crazy thought ran through my mind that if they killed him all Darkover would rise and exterminate the trailmen and it would all be my fault. Then Regis tore one hand free, and made a curious motion with his fingers.

It looked like an immense green spark a foot long, or like

a fireball. It exploded in one creature's white face and she gave a wild howl of terror and anguish, scrabbled blindly at her eyes, and with a despairing shriek, ran for the shelter of the trees. The pack of trailmen gave a long formless wail, and then they were gathering, flying, retreating into the shadows. Rafe yelled something obscene and then a bolt of bluish flame lanced toward the retreating pack. One of the humanoids fell without a cry, pitching senseless over the ledge.

I ran toward Rafe, struggling with him for the shocker he had drawn from its hiding-place inside his shirt. "You blind damned fool!" I cursed him, "you may have ruined everything—"

"They'd have killed him without it," he retorted wrathfully. He had evidently failed to see how efficiently Regis defended himself. Rafe motioned toward the fleeing pack and sneered, "Why don't you go with your friends?"

With a grip I thought I had forgotten, I got my hand around Rafe's knuckles and squeezed. His hand went limp and I snatched the shocker and pitched it over the ledge.

"One word and I'll pitch you after it," I warned. "Who's hurt?"

Garin was blinking senselessly, half-dazed by a blow; Regis' forehead had been gashed and dripped blood, and Hjalmar's thigh sliced in a clean cut. My

own knuckles were laid bare and the hand was getting numb. It was a little while before anybody noticed Kyla, crouched over speechless with pain. She reeled and turned deathly white when we touched her; we stretched her out where she was, and got her shirt off, and Kendricks crowded up beside us to examine the wound.

"A clean cut," he said, but I didn't hear. Something had turned over inside me, like a hand stirring up my brain, and . . .

Jay Allison looked around with a gasp of sudden vertigo. He was not in Forth's office, but standing precariously near the edge of a cliff. He shut his eyes briefly, wondering if he were having one of his worst nightmares, and opened them on a familiar face.

Buck Kendricks was bone-white, his mouth widening as he said hoarsely, "Jay! Doctor Allison—for God's sake—"

A doctor's training creates reactions that are almost reflexes; Jay Allison recovered some degree of sanity as he became aware that someone was stretched out in front of him, half-naked, and bleeding profusely. He motioned away the crowding strangers and said in his bad Darkovan, "Let her alone, this is my work." He didn't know enough words to curse them away, so he switched to Terran, speaking to Kendricks:

"Buck, get these people away,

give the patient some air. Where's my surgical case?" He bent and probed briefly, realizing only now that the injured was a woman, and young.

The wound was only a superficial laceration; whatever sharp instrument had inflicted it, had turned on the costal bone without penetrating lung tissue. It could have been sutured, but Kendricks handed him only a badly-filled first-aid kit; so Dr. Allison covered it tightly with a plastic clip-shield which would seal it from further bleeding, and let it alone. By the time he had finished, the strange girl had begun to stir. She said haltingly, "Jason—?"

"Dr. Allison," he corrected tersely, surprised in a minor way—the major surprise had blurred lesser ones—that she knew his name. Kendricks spoke swiftly to the girl, in one of the Darkovan languages Jay didn't understand, and then drew Jay aside, out of earshot. He said in a shaken voice, "Jay, I didn't know—I wouldn't have believed—you're *Doctor Allison*? Good Lord—Jason!"

And then he moved fast. "What's the matter? Oh, hell, Jay, don't faint on me!"

Jay was aware that he didn't come out of it too bravely, but anyone who blamed him (he thought resentfully) should try it on for size; going to sleep in a comfortably closed-in office and waking up on a cliff at the outer edges of nowhere. His hand

hurt; he saw that it was bleeding and flexed it experimentally, trying to determine that no tendons had been injured. He rapped, "How did this happen?"

"Sir, keep your voice down—or speak Darkovan!"

Jay blinked again. Kendricks was still the only familiar thing in a strangely vertiginous universe. The Spaceforce man said huskily, "Before heaven, Jay, I hadn't any idea—and I've known you how long? Eight, nine years?"

Jay said, "That idiot Forth!" and swore, the colorless profanity of an indoor man.

Somebody shouted, "Jason!" in an imperative voice, and Kendricks said shakily, "Jay, if they see you—you literally are not the same man!"

"Obviously not." Jay looked at the tent, one pole still unpitched. "Anyone in there?"

"Not yet." Kendricks almost shoved him inside. "I'll tell them—I'll tell them something." He took a radiant from his pocket, set it down and stared at Allison in the flickering light, and said something profane. "You'll—you'll be all right here?"

Jay nodded. It was all he could manage. He was keeping a tight hold on his nerve; if it went, he'd start to rave like a madman. A little time passed, there were strange noises outside, and then there was a polite cough and a man walked into the tent.

He was obviously a Darkovan aristocrat and looked vaguely

familiar, though Jay had no conscious memory of seeing him before. Tall and slender, he possessed that perfect and exquisite masculine beauty sometimes seen among Darkovans, and he spoke to Jay familiarly but with surprising courtesy:

"I have told them you are not to be disturbed for a moment, that your hand is worse than we believed. A surgeon's hands are delicate things, Doctor Allison, and I hope that yours are not badly injured. Will you let me look?"

Jay Allison drew back his hand automatically, then, conscious of the churlishness of the gesture, let the stranger take it in his and look at the fingers. The man said, "It does not seem serious. I was sure it was something more than that." He raised grave eyes. "You don't even remember my name, do you, Dr. Allison?"

"You know who I am?"

"Dr. Forth didn't tell me. But we Hasturs are partly telepathic, Jason—forgive me—Doctor Allison. I have known from the first that you were possessed by a god or daemon."

"Superstitious rubbish," Jay snapped. "Typical of a Darkovan!"

"It is a convenient manner of speaking, no more," said the young Hastur, overlooking the rudeness. "I suppose I could learn your terminology, if I considered it worth the effort. I have had psi training, and I can tell the difference when half of

a man's soul has driven out the other half. Perhaps I can restore you to yourself—"

"If you think I'd have some Darkovan freak meddling with my mind—" Jay began hotly, then stopped. Under Regis' grave eyes, he felt a surge of unfamiliar humility. This crew of men needed their leader, and obviously he, Jay Allison, wasn't the leader they needed. He covered his eyes with one hand.

Regis bent and put a hand on his shoulder, compassionately, but Jay twitched it off, and his voice, when he found it, was bitter and defensive and cold.

"All right. The work's the thing. I can't do it, Jason can. You're a parapsych. If you can switch me off—go right ahead!"

I stared at Regis, passing a hand across my forehead. "What happened?" I demanded, and in even swifter apprehension, "Where's Kyla? She was hurt—"

"Kyla's all right," Regis said, but I got up quickly to make sure. Kyla was outside, lying quite comfortably on a roll of blankets. She was propped on her elbow drinking something hot, and there was a good smell of hot food in the air. I stared at Regis and demanded, "I didn't conk out, did I, from a little scratch like this?" I looked carelessly at my gashed hand.

"Wait—" Regis held me back, "don't go out just yet. Do you remember what happened, Doctor Allison?"

I stared in growing horror,

my worst fear confirmed. Regis said quietly, "You—changed. Probably from the shock of seeing—" he stopped in mid-sentence, and I said, "The last thing I remember is seeing that Kyla was bleeding, when we got her clothes off. But—good Gods, a little blood wouldn't scare *me*, and Jay Allison's a surgeon, would it bring him roaring up like that?"

"I couldn't say." Regis looked as if he knew more than he was telling. "I don't believe that Dr. Allison—he's not much like you—was very concerned with Kyla. Are you?"

"Damn right I am. I want to make sure she's all right—" I stopped abruptly. "Regis—did they all see it?"

"Only Kendricks and I," Regis said, "and we will not speak of it."

I said, "Thanks," and felt his reassuring hand-clasp. Damn it, demigod or prince, I *liked* Regis.

I went out and accepted some food from the kettle and sat down between Kyla and Kendricks to eat. I was shaken, weak with reaction. Furthermore, I realized that we couldn't stay here. It was too vulnerable to attack. So, in our present condition, were we. If we could push on hard enough to get near Dammerung pass tonight, then tomorrow we could cross it early, before the sun warmed the snow and we had snowslides and slush to deal with. Beyond Dammerung, I knew the tribesmen and could speak their language.

I mentioned this, and Kendricks looked doubtfully at Kyla. "Can she climb?"

"Can she stay here?" I countered. But I went and sat beside her anyhow.

"How badly are you hurt? Do you think you can travel?"

She said fiercely, "Of course I can climb! I tell you, I'm no weak girl, I'm a free Amazon!" She flung off the blanket somebody had tucked around her legs. Her lips looked a little pinched, but the long stride was steady as she walked to the fire and demanded more soup.

We struck the camp in minutes. The trailmen band of raiding females had snatched up almost everything portable, and there was no sense in striking and caching the tent; they'd return and hunt it out. If we came back with a trailmen escort, we wouldn't need it anyway. I ordered them to leave everything but the lightest gear, and examined each remaining rucksack. Rations for the night we would spend in the pass, our few remaining blankets, ropes, sunglasses. Everything else I ruthlessly ordered left behind.

It was harder going now. For one thing, the sun was lowering, and the evening wind was icy. Nearly everyone of us had some hurt, slight in itself, which hindered us in climbing. Kyla was white and rigid, but did not spare herself; Kendricks was suffering severely from mountain sickness at this altitude, and I gave him all the help I

could, but with my stiffening slashed hand I wasn't having too easy a time myself.

There was one expanse that was sheer rock-climbing, flattened like bugs against a wall, scrambling for hand-holds and footholds. I felt it a point of pride to lead, and I led; but by the time we had climbed the thirty-foot wall, and scrambled along a ledge to where we could pick up the trail again, I was ready to give over. Crowding together on the ledge, I changed places with the veteran Lerrys, who was better than most professional climbers.

He muttered, "I thought you said this was a *trail*!"

I stretched my mouth in what was supposed to be a grin and didn't quite make it. "For the trailmen, this is a superhighway. And no one else ever comes this way."

Now we climbed slowly over snow; once or twice we had to flounder through drifts, and once a brief bitter snowstorm blotted out sight for twenty minutes, while we hugged each other on the ledge, clinging wildly against wind and icy sleet.

We bivouacked that night in a crevasse blown almost clean of snow, well above the tree-line, where only scrubby unkillable thornbushes clustered. We tore down some of them and piled them up as a windbreak, and bedded beneath it; but we all thought with aching regret of

the comfort of the camp gear we'd abandoned. The going had gotten good and rough.

That night remains in my mind as one of the most miserable in memory. Except for the slight ringing in my ears, the height alone did not bother me, but the others did not fare so well. Most of the men had blinding headaches, Kyla's slashed side must have given her considerable pain, and Kendricks had succumbed to mountain-sickness in its most agonizing form: severe cramps and vomiting. I was desperately uneasy about all of them, but there was nothing I could do; the only cure for mountain-sickness is oxygen or a lower altitude, neither of which was practical.

In the windbreak we doubled up, sharing blankets and body warmth: I took a last look around the close space before crawling in beside Kendricks, and saw the girl bedding down slightly apart from the others. I started to say something, but Kendricks spoke, first. Voicing my thoughts.

"Better crawl in with us, girl." He added, coldly but not unkindly, "you needn't worry about any funny stuff."

Kyla gave me just the flicker of a grin, and I realized she was including me on the Darkovan side of a joke against this big man who was so unaware of Darkovan etiquette. But her voice was cool and curt as she said, "I'm not worrying," and loosened her heavy coat slightly

before creeping into the nest of blankets between us.

It was painfully cramped, and chilly in spite of the self-heating blankets; we crowded close together and Kyla's head rested on my shoulder. I felt her snuggle closely to me, half asleep, hunting for a warm place; and I found myself very much aware of her closeness, curiously grateful to her. An ordinary woman would have protested, if only as a matter of form, sharing blankets with two strange men. I realized that if Kyla had refused to crawl in with us, she would have called attention to her sex much *more* than she did by matter-of-factly behaving as if she were, in fact, male.

She shivered convulsively, and I whispered, "Side hurting? Are you cold?"

"A little. It's been a long time since I've been at these altitudes, too. What it really is—I can't get those women out of my head."

Kendricks coughed, moving uncomfortably. "I don't understand—those creatures who attacked us—all women—?"

I explained briefly. "Among the people of the Sky, as everywhere, more females are born than males. But the trailmen's lives are so balanced that they have no room for extra females within the Nests—the cities. So when a girl child of the Sky People reaches womanhood, the other women drive her out of the city with kicks and blows, and she has to wander in the for-

est until some male comes after her and claims her and brings her back as his own. Then she can never be driven forth again, although if she bears no children she can be forced to be a servant to his other wives."

Kendricks made a little sound of disgust.

"You think it cruel," Kyla said with sudden passion, "but in the forest they can live and find their own food; they will not starve or die. Many of them prefer the forest life to living in the Nests, and they will fight away any male who comes near them. We who call ourselves human often make less provision for our spare women."

She was silent, sighing as if with pain. Kendricks made no reply except a non-committal grunt. I held myself back by main force from touching Kyla, remembering what she was, and finally said, "We'd better quit talking. The others want to sleep, if we don't."

After a time I heard Kendricks snoring, and Kyla's quiet even breaths. I wondered drowsily how Jay would have felt about this situation—he who hated Darkover and avoided contact with every other human being, crowded between a Darkovan free-Amazon and half a dozen assorted roughnecks. I turned the thought off, fearing it might somehow re-arouse him in his brain.

But I had to think of something, anything to turn aside

this consciousness of the woman's head against my chest, her warm breath coming and going against my bare neck. Only by the severest possible act of will did I keep myself from slipping my hand over her breasts, warm and palpable through the thin sweater, I wondered why Forth had called me undisciplined. I couldn't risk my leadership by making advances to our contracted guide—woman, Amazon or whatever!

Somehow the girl seemed to be the pivot point of all my thoughts. She was not part of the Terran HQ, she was not part of any world Jay Allison might have known. She belonged wholly to Jason, to *my* world. Between sleep and waking, I lost myself in a dream of skimming flight-wise along the tree roads, chasing the distant form of a girl driven from the Nest that day with blows and curses. Somewhere in the leaves I would find her . . . and we would return to the city, her head garlanded with the red leaves of a chosen-one, and the same women who had stoned her forth would crowd about and welcome her when she returned. The fleeing woman looked over her shoulder with Kyla's eyes; and then the woman's form muted and Dr. Forth was standing between us in the tree-road, with the caduceus emblem on his coat stretched like a red staff between us. Kendricks in his Spaceforce uniform was threatening us with a blaster, and Regis Hastur was

suddenly wearing Space Service uniform too and saying, "Jay Allison, Jay Allison," as the tree-road splintered and cracked beneath our feet and we were tumbling down the waterfall and down and down and down . . .

"Wake up!" Kyla whispered, and dug an elbow into my side. I opened my eyes on crowded blackness, grasping at the vanishing nightmare. "What's the matter?"

"You were moaning. Touch of altitude sickness?"

I grunted, realized my arm was around her shoulder, and pulled it quickly away. After awhile I slept again, fitfully.

Before light we crawled wearily out of the bivouac, cramped and stiff and not rested, but ready to get out of this and go on. The snow was hard, in the dim light, and the trail not difficult here. After all the trouble on the lower slopes, I think even the amateurs had lost their desire for adventurous climbing; we were all just as well pleased that the actual crossing of Dammerung should be an anticlimax and uneventful.

The sun was just rising when we reached the pass, and we stood for a moment, gathered close together, in the narrow defile between the great summits to either side.

Hjalmar gave the peaks a wistful look.

"Wish we could climb them."

Regis grinned at him companionably. "Sometime — and

you have the word of a Hastur, you'll be along on that expedition." The big fellows' eyes glowed. Regis turned to me, and said warmly, "What about it, Jason? A bargain? Shall we all climb it together, next year?"

I started to grin back and then some bleak black devil surged up in me, raging. When this was over, I'd suddenly realized, I wouldn't be there. I wouldn't be anywhere. I was a surrogate, a substitute, a splinter of Jay Allison, and when it was over, Forth and his tactics would put me back into what they considered my rightful place—which was nowhere. I'd never climb a mountain except now, when we were racing against time and necessity. I set my mouth in an unaccustomed narrow line and said, "We'll talk about that when we get back—if we ever do. Now I suggest we get going. Some of us would like to get down to lower altitudes."

The trail down from Dammerung inside the ridge, unlike the outside trail, was clear and well-marked, and we wound down the slope, walking in easy single file. As the mist thinned and we left the snow-line behind, we saw what looked like a great green carpet, interspersed with shining colors which were mere flickers below us. I pointed them out.

"The treetops of the North Forest—and the colors you see are in the streets of the Trail-city."

An hour's walking brought us to the edge of the forest. We

travelled swiftly now, forgetting our weariness, eager to reach the city before nightfall. It was quiet in the forest, almost ominously still. Over our head somewhere, in the thick branches which in places shut out the sunlight completely, I knew that the tree-roads ran crisscross, and now and again I heard some rustle, a fragment of sound, a voice, a snatch of song.

"It's so dark down here," Rafe muttered, "anyone living in this forest would *have* to live in the treetops, or go totally blind!"

Kendricks whispered to me, "Are we being followed? Are they going to jump us?"

"I don't think so. What you hear are just the inhabitants of the city—going about their daily business up there."

"Queer business it must be," Regis said curiously, and as we walked along the mossy, needly forest floor, I told him something of the trailmen's lives. I had lost my fear. If anyone came at us now, I could speak their language, I could identify myself, tell my business, name my foster-parents. Some of my confidence evidently spread to the others.

But as we came into more and more familiar territory, I stopped abruptly and struck my hand against my forehead.

"I knew we had forgotten something!" I said roughly, "I've been away from here too long, that's all. Kyla."

"What about Kyla?"

The girl explained it herself,

in her expressionless monotone. "I am an unattached female. Such women are not permitted in the Nests."

"That's easy, then," Lerrys said. "She must belong to one of us." He didn't add a syllable. No one could have expected it; Darkovan aristocrats don't bring their women on trips like this, and their women are not like Kyla.

The three brothers broke into a spate of volunteering, and Rafe made an obscene suggestion. Kyla scowled obstinately, her mouth tight with what could have been embarrassment or rage. "If you believe I need your protection—!"

"Kyla," I said tersely, "is under *my* protection. She will be introduced as my woman—and treated as such."

Rafe twisted his mouth in an un-funny smile. "I see the leader keeps all the best for himself?"

My face must have done something I didn't know about, for Rafe backed slowly away. I forced myself to speak slowly: "Kyla is a guide, and indispensable. If anything happens to me, she is the only one who can lead you back. Therefore her safety is my personal affair. Understand?"

As we went along the trail, the vague green light disappeared. "We're right below the Trail-city," I whispered, and pointed upward. All around us the Hundred Trees rose, branchless

pillars so immense that four men, hands joined, could not have encircled one with their arms. They stretched upward for some three hundred feet, before stretching out their interweaving branches; above that, nothing was visible but blackness.

Yet the grove was not dark, but lighted with the startlingly brilliant phosphorescence of the fungi growing on the trunks, and trimmed into bizarre ornamental shapes. In cages of transparent fibre, glowing insects as large as a hand hummed softly and continuously.

As I watched, a trailman—quite naked except for an ornate hat and a narrow binding around the loins—descended the trunk. He went from cage to cage, feeding the glow-worms with bits of shining fungus from a basket on his arm.

I called to him in his own language, and he dropped the basket, with an exclamation, his spidery thin body braced to flee or to raise an alarm.

"But I belong to the Nest," I called to him, and gave him the names of my foster-parents. He came toward me, gripping my forearm with warm long fingers in a gesture of greeting.

"Jason? Yes, I hear them speak of you," he said in his gentle twittering voice, "you are at home. But those others—?" He gestured nervously at the strange faces.

"My friends," I assured him, "and we come to beg the Old One for an audience. For tonight

I seek shelter with my parents, if they will receive us."

He raised his head and called softly, and a slim child bounded down the trunk and took the basket. The trailman said, "I am Carrho. Perhaps it would be better if I guided you to your foster-parents, so you will not be challenged."

I breathed more freely. I did not personally recognize Carrho, but he looked pleasantly familiar. Guided by him, we climbed one by one up the dark stairway inside the trunk, and emerged into the bright square, shaded by the topmost leaves into a delicate green twilight. I felt weary and successful.

Kendricks stepped gingerly on the swaying, jiggling floor of the square. It gave slightly at every step, and Kendricks swore morosely in a language that fortunately only Rafe and I understood. Curious trailmen flocked to the street and twittered welcome and surprise.

Rafe and Kendricks betrayed considerable contempt when I greeted my foster-parents affectionately. They were already old, and I was saddened to see it; their fur graying, their prehensile toes and fingers crooked with a rheumatic complaint of some sort, their reddish eyes bleared and rheumy. They welcomed me, and made arrangements for the others in my party to be housed in an abandoned house nearby . . . they had insisted that I, of course, must re-

turn to their roof, and Kyla, of course, had to stay with me.

"Couldn't we camp on the ground instead?" Kendricks asked, eying the flimsy shelter with distaste.

"It would offend our hosts," I said firmly. I saw nothing wrong with it. Roofed with woven bark, carpeted with moss which was planted on the floor, the place was abandoned, somewhat a bit musty, but weathertight and seemed comfortable to me.

The first thing to be done was to despatch a messenger to the Old One, begging the favor of an audience with him. That done, (by one of my foster-brothers), we settled down to a meal of buds, honey, insects and birds eggs! it tasted good to me, with the familiarity of food eaten in childhood, but among the others, only Kyla ate with appetite and Regis Hastur with interested curiosity.

After the demands of hospitality had been satisfied, my foster-parents asked the names of my party, and I introduced them one by one. When I named Regis Hastur, it reduced them to brief silence, and then to an outcry; gently but firmly, they insisted that their home was unworthy to shelter the son of a Hastur, and that he must be fittingly entertained at the Royal Nest of the Old One.

There was no gracious way for Regis to protest, and when the messenger returned, he prepared to accompany him. But be-

fore leaving, he drew me aside:

"I don't much like leaving the rest of you—"

"You'll be safe enough."

"It's not that I'm worried about, Dr. Allison."

"Call me Jason," I corrected angrily. Regis said, with a little tightening of his mouth, "That's it. You'll have to be Dr. Allison tomorrow when you tell the Old One about your mission. But you have to be the Jason he knows, too."

"So—?"

"I wish I needn't leave here. I wish you were—going to stay with the men who know you only as Jason, instead of being alone—or only with Kyla."

There was something odd in his face, and I wondered at it. Could he—a Hastur—be jealous of Kyla? Jealous of *me*? It had never occurred to me that he might be somehow attracted to Kyla. I tried to pass it off lightly:

"Kyla might divert me."

Regis said without emphasis, "Yet she brought Dr. Allison back once before." Then, surprisingly, he laughed. "Or maybe you're right. Maybe Kyla will—scare away Dr. Allison if he shows up."

The coals of the dying fire laid strange tints of color on Kyla's face and shoulders and the wispy waves of her dark hair. Now that we were alone, I felt constrained.

"Can't you sleep, Jason?"

I shook my head. "Better sleep while you can." I felt that this

night of all nights I dared not close my eyes or when I woke I would have vanished into the Jay Allison I hated. For a moment I saw the room with his eyes; to him it would not seem cosy and clean, but—habituated to white sterile tile, Terran rooms and corridors—dirty and unsanitary as any beast's den.

Kyla said broodingly, "You're a strange man, Jason. What sort of man are you—in Terra's world?"

I laughed, but there was no mirth in it. Suddenly I had to tell her the whole truth:

"Kyla, the man you know as me doesn't exist. I was created for this one specific task. Once it's finished, so am I."

She started, her eyes widening. "I've heard tales of—of the Terrans and their sciences—that they make men who aren't real, men of metal—not bone and flesh—"

Before the dawning of that naive horror I quickly held out my bandaged hand, took her fingers in mine and ran them over it. "Is this metal? No, no, Kyla. But the man you know as Jason—I won't be him, I'll be someone different—" How could I explain a subsidiary personality to Kyla, when I didn't understand it myself?

She kept my fingers in hers softly and said, "I saw—someone else—looking from your eyes at me once. A ghost."

I shook my head savagely. "To the Terrans, I'm the ghost!"

"Poor ghost," she whispered.

Her pity stung. I didn't want it.

"What. I don't remember I can't regret. Probably I won't even remember you." But I lied. I knew that although I forgot everything else, unregretting because unremembered, I could not bear to lose this girl, that my ghost would walk restless forever if I forgot her. I looked across the fire at Kyla, cross-legged in the faint light—only a few coals in the brazier. She had removed her sexless outer clothing, and wore some clinging garment, as simple as a child's smock and curiously appealing. There was still a little ridge of bandage visible beneath it and a random memory, not mine, remarked in the back corners of my brain that with the cut improperly sutured there would be a visible scar. *Visible to whom?*

She reached out an appealing hand. "Jason! Jason—?"

My self-possession deserted me. I felt as if I stood, small and reeling, under a great empty echoing chamber which was Jay Allison's mind, and that the roof was about to fall in on me. Kyla's image flickered in and out of focus, first infinitely gentle and appealing, then—as if seen at the wrong end of a telescope—far away and sharply incised and as remote and undesirable as any bug underneath a lens.

Her hands closed on my shoulders. I put out a groping hand to push her away.

"Jason," she implored, "don't

—go away from me like that! Talk to me, tell me!"

But her words reached me through emptiness . . . I knew important things might hang on tomorrow's meeting, Jason alone could come through that meeting, where the Terrans for some reason put him through this hell and damnation and torture . . . oh, yes . . . the trailmen's fever.

Jay Allison pushed the girl's hand away and scowled savagely, trying to collect his thoughts and concentrate them on what he must say and do, to convince the trailmen of their duty toward the rest of the planet. As if they—not even human—could have a sense of duty!

With an unaccustomed surge of emotion, he wished he were

with the others. Kendricks, now. Jay knew, precisely, why Forth had sent the big, reliable spaceman at his back. And that handsome, arrogant Darkovan—where was he? Jay looked at the girl in puzzlement; he didn't want to reveal that he wasn't quite sure of what he was saying or doing, or that he had little memory of what Jason had been up to.

He started to ask, "Where did the Hastur kid go?" before a vagrant logical thought told him that such an important guest would have been lodged with the Old One. Then a wave of despair hit him; Jay realized he did not even speak the trailmen's language, that it had slipped from his thoughts completely.



She felt a touch of panic. He was leaving her again.

"You—" he fished desperately for the girl's name, "Kyla. You don't speak the trailmen's language, do you?"

"A few words. No more. Why?" She had withdrawn into a corner of the tiny room—still not far from him—and he wondered remotely what his damned alter ego had been up to. With Jason, there was no telling. Jay raised his eyes with a melancholy smile.

"Sit down, child. You needn't be frightened."

"I'm—I'm trying to understand—" the girl touched him again, evidently trying to conquer her terror. "It isn't easy—when you turn into someone else under my eyes—" Jay saw that she was shaking in real fright.

He said wearily, "I'm not going to—to turn into a bat and fly away. I'm just a poor devil of a doctor who's gotten himself into one unholy mess." There was no reason, he was thinking, to take out his own misery and despair by shouting at this poor kid. God knew what she'd been through with his irresponsible other self—Forth had admitted that that damned "Jason" personality was a blend of all the undesirable traits he'd fought to smother all his life. By an effort of will he kept himself from pulling away from her hand on his shoulder.

"Jason, don't—slip away like that! *Think!* Try to keep hold on *yourself!*"

Jay propped his head in his hands, trying to make sense of

that. Certainly in the dim light she could not be too conscious of subtle changes of expression. She evidently thought she was talking to Jason. She didn't seem to be overly intelligent.

"Think about tomorrow, Jason. What are you going to say to him? Think about your parents—"

Jay Allison wondered what they would think when they found a stranger here. He felt like a stranger. Yet he must have come, tonight, into this house and spoken—he rummaged desperately in his mind for some fragments of the trailmen's language. He had spoken it as a child. He must recall enough to speak to the woman who had been a kind foster-mother to her alien son. He tried to form his lips to the unfamiliar shapes of words . . .

Jay covered his face with his hands again. Jason was the part of himself that remembered the trailmen. *That* was what he had to remember—Jason was not a hostile stranger, not an alien intruder in his body. Jason was a lost part of himself and at the moment a damn necessary part. If there were only some way to get back the Jason memories, skills, without losing *himself* . . . he said to the girl, "Let me think. Let me—" to his surprise and horror his voice broke into an alien tongue, "Let me alone, will you?"

Maybe, Jay thought, I could stay myself if I could remember the rest. Dr. Forth said: Jason

would remember the trailmen with kindness, not dislike.

Jay searched his memory and found nothing but familiar frustration; years spent in an alien land, apart from a human heritage, stranded and abandoned. *My father left me. He crashed the plane and I never saw him again and I hate him for leaving me . . .*

But his father had not abandoned him. He had crashed the plane trying to save them both. It was no one's fault—

Except my father's. For trying to fly over the Hellers into a country where no man belongs . . .

He hadn't belonged. And yet the trailmen, whom he considered little better than roaming beasts, had taken the alien child into their city, their homes, their hearts. They had loved him. And he . . .

"And I loved them," I found myself saying half aloud, then realized that Kyla was gripping my arm, looking up imploringly into my face. I shook my head rather groggily. "What's the matter?"

"You frightened me," she said in a shaky little voice, and I suddenly knew what had happened. I tensed with savage rage against Jay Allison. He couldn't even give me the splinter of life I'd won for myself, but had to come sneaking out of my mind, how he must hate me! Not half as much as I hated him, damn him! Along with everything else,

he'd scared Kyla half to death!

She was kneeling very close to me, and I realized that there was one way to fight that cold austere fish of a Jay Allison, send him shrieking down into hell again. He was a man who hated everything except the cold world he'd made his life. Kyla's face was lifted, soft and intent and pleading, and suddenly I reached out and pulled her to me and kissed her, hard.

"Could a ghost do this?" I demanded, "or this?"

She whispered, "No—oh, no," and her arms went up to lock around my neck. As I pulled her down on the sweet-smelling moss that carpeted the chamber, I felt the dark ghost of my other self thin out, vanish and disappear.

Regis had been right. It had been the only way . . .

The Old One was not old at all; the title was purely ceremonial. This one was young—not much older than I—but he had poise and dignity and the same strange indefinable quality I had recognized in Regis Hastur. It was something, I supposed, that the Terran Empire had lost in spreading from star to star. A feeling of knowing one's own place, a dignity that didn't demand recognition because it had never lacked for it.

Like all trailmen he had the chinless face and lobeless ears, the heavy-haired body which looked slightly less than human. He spoke very low—the trailmen have very acute hearing—and I

had to strain my ears to listen, and remember to keep my own voice down.

He stretched his hand to me, and I lowered my head over it and murmured, "I take submission, Old One."

"Never mind that," he said in his gentle twittering voice, "sit down, my son. You are welcome here, but I feel you have abused our trust in you. We dismissed you to your own kind because we felt you would be happier so. Did we show you anything but kindness, that after so many years you return with armed men?"

The reproof in his red eyes was hardly an auspicious beginning. I said helplessly, "Old One, the men with me are not armed. A band of those-who-may-not-enter-cities attacked us, and we defended ourselves. I travelled with so many men only because I feared to travel the passes alone."

"But does that explain why you have returned at all?" The reason and reproach in his voice made sense.

Finally I said, "Old One, we come as suppliants. My people appeal to your people in the hope that you will be—" I started to say, *as human*, stopped and amended "—that you will deal as kindly with them as with me."

His face betrayed nothing. "What do you ask?"

I explained. I told it badly, stumbling, not knowing the technical terms, knowing they had no equivalents anyway in the

trailmen's language. He listened, asking a penetrating question now and again. When I mentioned the Terran Legate's offer to recognize the trailmen as a separate and independent government, he frowned and rebuked me:

"We of the Sky People have no dealings with the Terrans, and care nothing for their recognition—or its lack."

For that I had no answer, and the Old One continued, kindly but indifferently, "We do not like to think that the fever which is a children's little sickness with us shall kill so many of your kind. But you cannot in all honesty blame us. You cannot say that we spread the disease; we never go beyond the mountains. Are we to blame that the winds change or the moons come together in the sky? When the time has come for men to die, they die." He stretched his hand in dismissal. "I will give your men safe-conduct to the river, Jason. Do not return."

Regis Hastur rose suddenly and faced him. "Will you hear me, Father?" He used the ceremonial title without hesitation, and the Old One said in distress, "The son of Hastur need never speak as a suppliant to the Sky People!"

"Nevertheless, hear me as a suppliant, Father," Regis said quietly. "It is not the strangers and aliens of Terra who are pleading. We have learned one thing from the strangers of Terra, which you have not yet

learned. I am young and it is not fitting that I should teach you, but you have said; are we to blame that the moons come together in the sky? No. But we have learned from the Terrans not to blame the moons in the sky for our own ignorance of the ways of the Gods—by which I mean the ways of sickness or poverty or misery."

"These are strange words for a Hastur," said the Old One, displeased.

"These are strange times for a Hastur," said Regis loudly. The Old One winced, and Regis moderated his tone, but continued vehemently, "You blame the moons in the sky. *I* say the moons are not to blame—nor the winds—nor the Gods. The Gods send these things to men to test their wits and to find if they have the will to master them!"

The Old One's forehead ridged vertically and he said with stinging contempt, "Is this the breed of king which men call Hastur now?"

"Man or God or Hastur, I am not too proud to plead for my people," retorted Regis, flushing with anger. "Never in all the history of Darkover has a Hastur stood before one of you and begged—"

"—for the men from another world."

"—for all men on our world! Old One, I could sit and keep state in the House of the Hasturs, and even death could not touch me until I grew weary of

living! But I preferred to learn new lives from new men. The Terrans have something to teach even the Hasturs, and they can learn a remedy against the trailmen's fever." He looked round at me, turning the discussion over to me again, and I said:

"I am no alien from another world, Old One. I have been a son in your house. Perhaps I was sent to teach you to fight destiny. I cannot believe you are indifferent to death."

Suddenly, hardly knowing what I was going to do until I found myself on my knees, I knelt and looked up into the quiet stern remote face of the nonhuman:

"My father," I said, "you took a dying man and a dying child from a burning plane. Even those of their own kind might have stripped their corpses and left them to die. You saved the child, fostered him and treated him as a son. When he reached an age to be unhappy with you, you let a dozen of your people risk their lives to take him to his own. You cannot ask me to believe that you are indifferent to the death of a million of my people, when the fate of one could stir your pity!"

There was a moment's silence. Finally the Old One said, "Indifferent—no. But helpless. My people die when they leave the mountains. The air is too rich for them. The food is wrong. The light blinds and tortures them. Can I send them to suffer

and die, those people who call me father?"

And a memory, buried all my life, suddenly surfaced. I said urgently, "Father, listen. In the world I live in now, I am called a wise man. You need not believe me, but listen; I know your people, they are my people. I remember when I left you, more than a dozen of my foster-parents' friends offered, knowing they risked death, to go with me. I was a child; I did not realize the sacrifice they made. But I watched them suffer, as we went lower in the mountains, and I resolved . . . I resolved . . ." I spoke with difficulty, forcing the words through a reluctant barricade, ". . . that since others had suffered so for me . . . I would spend my life in curing the sufferings of others. Father, the Terrans call me a wise doctor, a man of healing. Among the Terrans I can see that my people, if they will come to us and help us, have air they can breathe and food which will suit them and that they are guarded from the light. I don't ask you to send anyone, father. I ask only—tell your sons what I have told you. If I know your people—who are my people forever—hundreds of them will offer to return with me. And you may witness what your foster-son has sworn here; if one of your sons dies, your alien son will answer for it with his own life."

The words had poured from me in a flood. They were not all mine; some unconscious thing

had recalled in me that Jay Allison had power to make these promises. For the first time I began to see what force, what guilt, what dedication working in Jay Allison had turned him aside from me. I remained at the Old One's feet, kneeling, overcome, ashamed of the thing I had become. Jay Allison was worth ten of me. Irresponsible, Forth had said. Lacking purpose, lacking balance. What right had I to despise my soberer self?

At last I felt the Old One touch my head lightly.

"Get up, my son," he said, "I will answer for my people. And forgive me for my doubts and my delays."

Neither Regis nor I spoke for a minute after we left the audience room; then, almost as one, we turned to each other. Regis spoke first, soberly.

"It was a fine thing you did, Jason. I didn't believe he'd agree to it."

"It was your speech that did it," I denied. The sober mood, the unaccustomed surge of emotion, was still on me, but it was giving way to a sudden upswing of exaltation. Damn it, I'd *done* it! Let Jay Allison try to match *that* . . .

Regis still looked grave. "He'd have refused, but you appealed to him as one of themselves. And yet it wasn't quite that . . . it was something more . . ." Regis put a quick embarrassed arm around my shoulders and

suddenly blurted out, "I think the Terran Medical played hell with your life, Jason! And even if it saves a million lives—it's hard to forgive them for that!"

Late the next day the Old One called us in again, and told us that a hundred men had volunteered to return with us and act as blood donors and experimental subjects for research into the trailmen's disease.

The trip over the mountains, so painfully accomplished was easier in return. Our escort of a hundred trailmen guaranteed us against attack, and they could choose the easiest paths.

Only as we undertook the long climb downward through the foothills did the trailmen, unused to ground travel at any time, and suffering from the unaccustomed low altitude, begin to weaken. As we grew stronger, more and more of them faltered, and we travelled more and more slowly. Not even Kendricks could be callous about "inhuman animals" by the time we reached the point where we had left the pack animals. And it was Rafe Scott who came to me and said desperately, "Jason, these poor fellows will never make it to Carthon. Lerrys and I know this country. Let us go ahead, as fast as we can travel alone, and arrange at Carthon for transit—maybe we can get pressurized aircraft to fly them from here. We can send a message from Carthon, too, about accommodations for them at the Terran HQ."

I was surprised and a little guilty that I had not thought of this myself. I covered it with a mocking, "I thought you didn't give a damn about 'any of my friends.'"

Rafe said doggedly, "I guess I was wrong about that. They're going through this out of a sense of duty, so they must be pretty different than I thought they were."

Regis, who had overheard Rafe's plan, now broke in quietly, "There's no need for you to travel ahead, Rafe. I can send a quicker message."

I had forgotten that Regis was a trained telepath. He added, "There are some space and distance limitations to such messages, but there is a regular relay net all over Darkover, and one of the relays is a girl who lives at the very edge of the Terran Zone. If you'll tell me what will give her access to the Terran HQ—" he flushed slightly and explained, "from what I know of the Terrans, she would not be very fortunate relaying the message if she merely walked to the gate and said she had a relayed telepathic message for someone, would she?"

I had to smile at the picture that conjured up in my mind. "I'm afraid not," I admitted. "Tell her to go to Dr. Forth, and give the message from Dr. Jason Allison."

Regis looked at me curiously—it was the first time I had spoken my own name in the hearing of the others. But he nodded,

without comment. For the next hour or two he seemed somewhat more pre-occupied than usual, but after a time he came to me and told me that the message had gone through. Sometime later he relayed an answer; that airlift would be waiting for us, not at Carthon, but a small village near the ford of the Kadarin where we had left our trucks.

When we camped that night there were a dozen practical problems needing attention; the time and exact place of crossing the ford, the reassurance to be given to terrified trailmen who could face leaving their forests but not crossing the final barricade of the river, the small help in our power to be given the sick ones. But after everything had been done that I could do, and after the whole camp had quieted down, I sat before the low-burning fire and stared into it, deep in painful lassitude. Tomorrow we would cross the river and a few hours later we would be back in the Terran HQ. And then . . .

And then . . . and then nothing. I would vanish, I would utterly cease to exist anywhere, except as a vagrant ghost troubling Jay Allison's unquiet dreams. As he moved through the cold round of his days I would be no more than a spent wind, a burst bubble, a thinned cloud.

The rose and saffron of the dying fire-colors gave shape to my dreams. Once more, as in the

trailcity that night, Kyla slipped through firelight to my side, and I looked up at her and suddenly I knew I could not bear it. I pulled her to me and muttered, "Oh, Kyla—Kyla, I won't even remember you!"

She pushed my hands away, kneeling upright, and said urgently, "Jason, listen. We are close to Carthon, the others can lead them the rest of the way. Why go back to them at all? Slip away now and never go back! We can—" she stopped, coloring fiercely, that sudden and terrifying shyness overcoming her again, and at last she said in a whisper, "Darkover is a wide world, Jason. Big enough for us to hide in. I don't believe they would search very far."

They wouldn't. I could leave word with Kendricks—not with Regis, the telepath would see through me immediately—that I had ridden ahead to Carthon, with Kyla. By the time they realized that I had fled, they would be too concerned with getting the trailmen safely to the Terran Zone to spend much time looking for a runaway. As Kyla said, the world was wide. And it was my world. And I would not be alone in it.

"Kyla, Kyla," I said helplessly, and crushed her against me, kissing her. She closed her eyes and I took a long, long look at her face. Not beautiful, no. But womanly and brave and all the other beautiful things. It was a farewell look, and I knew it, if she didn't.

After the briefest time, she pulled a little away, and her flat voice was gentler and more breathless than usual. "We'd better leave before the others waken." She saw that I did not move. "Jason—?"

I could not look at her. Muffled behind my hands, I said, "No, Kyla. I—I promised the Old One to look after my people in the Terran world. I must go back—"

"You won't be *there* to look after them! You won't be *you*!"

I said bleakly, "I'll write a letter to remind myself. Jay Allison has a very strong sense of duty. He'll look after them for me. He won't like it, but he'll do it, with his last breath. He's a better man than I am, Kyla. You'd better forget about me." I said, wearily, "I never existed."

That wasn't the end. Not nearly. She—begged, and I don't know why I put myself through the hell of stubbornness. But in the end she ran away, crying, and I threw myself down by the fire, cursing Forth, cursing my own folly, but most of all cursing Jay Allison, hating my other self with a blistering, sickening rage.

Coming through the outskirts of the small village the next afternoon, the village where the airlift would meet us, we noted that the poorer quarter was almost abandoned. Regis said bleakly, "It's begun," and dropped out of line to stand in the doorway of a silent dwelling.

After a minute he beckoned to me, and I looked inside.

I wished I hadn't. The sight would haunt me while I lived. An old man, two young women and half a dozen children between four and fifteen years old lay inside. The old man, one of the children, and one of the young women were laid out neatly in clean death, shrouded, their faces covered with green branches after the Darkovan custom for the dead. The other young woman lay huddled near the fireplace, her coarse dress splattered with the filthy stuff she had vomited, dying. The children—but even now I can't think of the children without retching. One, very small, had been in the woman's arms when she collapsed; it had squirmed free—for a little while. The others were in an indescribable condition and the worst of it was that one of them was still moving, feebly, long past help. Regis turned blindly from the door and leaned against the wall, his shoulders heaving. Not, as I first thought, in disgust, but in grief. Tears ran over his hands and spilled down, and when I took him by the arm to lead him away, he reeled and fell against me.

He said in a broken, blurred, choking voice, "Oh, Lord, Jason, those children, those children—if you ever had any doubts about what you're doing, any doubts about what you've done, think about that, think that you've saved a whole world from that,

think that you've done something even the Hasturs couldn't do!"

My own throat tightened with something more than embarrassment. "Better wait till we know for sure whether the Terrans can carry through with it, and you'd better get to hell away from this doorway. I'm immune, but damn it, you're not." But I had to take him and lead him away, like a child, from that house. He looked up into my face and said with burning sincerity, "I wonder if you believe I'd give my life, a dozen times over, to have done that?"

It was a curious, austere reward. But vaguely it comforted me. And then, as we rode into the village itself, I lost myself, or tried to lose myself, in reassuring the frightened trailmen who had never seen a city on the ground, never seen or heard of an airplane. I avoided Kyla. I didn't want a final word, a farewell. We had had our farewells already.

Forth had done a marvelous job of having quarters ready for the trailmen, and after they were comfortably installed and reassured, I went down wearily and dressed in Jay Allison's clothing. I looked out the window at the distant mountains and a line from the book on mountaineering, which I had bought as a youngster in an alien world, and Jay had kept as a stray fragment of personality, ran in violent conflict through my mind:

Something hidden—go and find it . . .

Something lost beyond the ranges . . .

I had just begun to live. Surely I deserved better than this, to vanish when I had just discovered life. Did the man who did not know how to live, deserve to live at all? Jay Allison—that cold man who had never looked beyond any ranges—why should I be lost in him?

Something lost beyond the ranges . . . nothing would be lost but myself. I was beginning to loathe the overflowed sense of duty which had brought me back here. Now, when it was too late, I was bitterly regretting . . . Kyla had offered me life. Surely I would never see Kyla again.

Could I regret what I would never remember? I walked into Forth's office as if I were going to my doom. I was . . .

Forth greeted me warmly.

"Sit down and tell me all about it . . ." he insisted. I would rather not speak. Instead, compulsively, I made it a full report . . . and curious flickers came in and out of my consciousness as I spoke. By the time I realized I was reacting to a post-hypnotic suggestion, that in fact I was going under hypnosis again, it was too late and I could only think that this was worse than death because in a way I would be alive . . .

Jay Allison sat up and meticulously straightened his cuff be-

fore tightening his mouth in what was meant for a smile. "I assume, then, that the experiment was a success?"

"A complete success." Forth's voice was somewhat harsh and annoyed, but Jay was untroubled; he had known for years that most of his subordinates and superiors disliked him, and had long ago stopped worrying about it.

"The trailmen agreed?"

"They agreed," Forth said, surprised. "You don't remember anything at all?"

"Scraps. Like a nightmare."

Jay Allison looked down at the back of his hand, flexing the fingers cautiously against pain, touching the partially healed red slash. Forth followed the direction of his eyes and said, not unsympathetically, "Don't worry about your hand. I looked at it pretty carefully. You'll have the total use of it."

Jay said rigidly, "It seems to have been a pretty severe risk to take. Did you ever stop to think what it would have meant to me, to lose the use of my hand?"

"It seemed a justifiable risk, even if you had," Forth said dryly. "Jay, I've got the whole story on tape, just as you told it to me. You might not like having a blank spot in your memory. Want to hear what your alter ego did?"

Jay hesitated. Then he unfolded his long legs and stood up. "No, I don't think I care to know." He waited, arrested by a

twinge of a sore muscle, and frowned.

What had happened, what would he never know, why did the random ache bring a pain deeper than the pain of a torn nerve? Forth was watching him, and Jay asked irritably, "What is it?"

"You're one hell of a cold fish, Jay."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"You wouldn't," Forth muttered. "Funny. I *liked* your subsidiary personality."

Jay's mouth contracted in a mirthless grin.

"You would," he said, and swung quickly round.

"Come on. If I'm going to work on that serum project I'd better inspect the volunteers and line up the blood donors and look over old whatshisname's papers."

But beyond the window the snowy ridges of the mountain, inscrutable, caught and held his eye; a riddle and a puzzle—

"Ridiculous," he said, and went to his work.

Four months later, Jay Allison and Randall Forth stood together, watching the last of the disappearing planes, carrying the volunteers back toward Carthon and their mountains.

"I should have flown back to Carthon with them," Jay said moodily. Forth watched the tall man stare at the mountain; wondered what lay behind the contained gestures and the brooding.

He said, "You've done enough, Jay. You've worked like the devil. Thurmond—the Legate—sent down to say you'd get an official commendation and a promotion for your part. That's not even mentioning what you did in the trailmen's city." He put a hand on his colleague's shoulder, but Jay shook it off impatiently.

All through the work of isolating and testing the blood fraction, Jay had worked tirelessly and unsparingly; scarcely sleeping, but brooding; silent, prone to fly into sudden savage rages, but painstaking. He had overseen the trailmen with an almost fatherly solicitude—but from a distance. He had left no stone unturned for their comfort—but refused to see them in person except when it was unavoidable.

Forth thought, we played a dangerous game. Jay Allison had made his own adjustment to life, and we disturbed that balance. Have we wrecked the man? He's expendable, but damn it, what a loss! He asked, "Well, why *didn't* you fly back to Carthon with them? Kendricks went along, you know. He expected you to go until the last minute."

Jay did not answer. He had avoided Kendricks, the only witness to his duality. In all his nightmare brooding, the avoidance of anyone who had known him as Jason became a mania. Once, meeting Rafe Scott on the lower floor of the HQ, he had turned frantically and plunged

like a madman through halls and corridors, to avoid coming face to face with the man, finally running up four flights of stairs and taking shelter in his rooms, with the pounding heart and bursting veins of a hunted criminal. At last he said, "If you've called me down here to read me the riot act about not wanting to make another trip into the Hellers—!"

"No, no," Forth said equably, "there's a visitor coming. Regis Hastur sent word he wants to see you. In case you don't remember him, he was on Project Jason—"

"I remember," Jay said grimly. It was nearly his one clear memory—the nightmare of the ledge, his slashed hand, the shameful naked body of the Darkovan woman, and—blurring these things, the too-handsome Darkovan aristocrat who had banished him for Jason again. "He's a better psychiatrist than you are, Forth. He changed me into Jason in the flicker of an eyelash, and it took you half a dozen hypnotic sessions."

"I've heard about the psi powers of the Hasturs," Forth said, "but I've never been lucky enough to meet one in person. Tell me about it. What did he do?"

Jay made a tight movement of exasperation, too controlled for a shrug. "Ask him, why don't you. Look, Forth, I don't much care to see him. I didn't do it for Darkover; I did it because it was my job. I'd prefer to for-

get the whole thing. Why don't you talk to him?"

"I rather had the idea that he wanted to see you personally. Jay, you did a tremendous thing, man! Damn it, why don't you strut a little? Be—be normal for once! Why, I'd be damned near bursting with pride if one of the Hasturs insisted on congratulating me personally!"

Jay's lip twitched, and his voice shook with controlled exasperation. "Maybe you would. I don't see it that way."

"Well, I'm afraid you'll have to. On Darkover nobody refuses when the Hasturs make a request—and certainly not a request as reasonable as this one." Forth sat down beside the desk. Jay struck the woodwork with a violent clenched fist and when he lowered his hand there was a tiny smear of blood along his knuckles. After a minute he walked to the couch and sat down, very straight and stiff, saying nothing. Neither of the men spoke again until Forth started at the sound of a buzzer, drew the mouthpiece toward him, and said, "Tell him we are honored—you know the routine for dignitaries, and send him up here."

Jay twisted his fingers together and ran his thumb, in a new gesture, over the ridge of scar tissue along the knuckles. Forth was aware of an entirely new quality in the silence, and started to speak to break it, but before he could do so, the office door slid open on its silent beam,

and Regis Hastur stood there.

Forth rose courteously and Jay got to his feet like a mechanical doll jerked on strings. The young Darkovan ruler smiled engagingly at him:

"Don't bother, this visit is informal; that's the reason I came here rather than inviting you both to the Tower. Dr. Forth? It is a pleasure to meet you again, sir. I hope that our gratitude to you will soon take a more tangible form. There has not been a single death from the trailmen's fever since you made the serum available."

Jay, motionless, saw bitterly that the old man had succumbed to the youngster's deliberate charm. The chubby, wrinkled old face seamed up in a pleased smile as Forth said, "The gifts sent to the trailmen in your name, Lord Hastur, were greatly welcomed."

"Do you think that any of us will ever forget what they have done?" Regis replied. He turned toward the window and smiled rather tentatively at the man who stood there; motionless since his first conventional gesture of politeness:

"Dr. Allison, do you remember me at all?"

"I remember you," Jay Allison said sullenly.

His voice hung heavy in the room, its sound a miasma in his ears. All his sleepless, nightmare-charged brooding, all his bottled hate for Darkover and the memories he had tried to bury, erupted into overwrought

bitterness against this too-ingratiating youngster who was a demigod on this world and who had humiliated him, repudiated him for the hated Jason . . . for Jay, Regis had suddenly become the symbol of a world that hated him, forced him into a false mold.

A black and rushing wind seemed to blur the room. He said hoarsely, "I remember you all right," and took one savage, hurtling step.

The weight of the unexpected blow spun Regis around, and the next moment Jay Allison, who had never touched another human being except with the remote hands of healing, closed steely, murderous hands around Regis' throat. The world thinned out into a crimson rage. There were shouting and sudden noises, and a red-hot explosion in his brain . . .

"You'd better drink this," Forth remarked, and I realized I was turning a paper cup in my hands. Forth sat down, a little weakly, as I raised it to my lips and sipped. Regis took his hand away from his throat and said huskily "I could use some of that, Doctor."

I put the whiskey down. "You'll do better with water until your throat muscles are healed," I said swiftly, and went to fill a throwaway cup for him, without thinking. Handing it to him. I stopped in sudden dismay and my hand shook, spilling a few drops. I said hoarsely, swal-

lowing, "—but drink it, anyway—"

Regis got a few drops down, painfully, and said, "My own fault. The moment I saw—Jay Allison—I knew he was a madman. I'd have stopped him sooner only he took me by surprise."

"But—you say *him*—I'm Jay Allison," I said, and then my knees went weak and I sat down. "What in hell is this? I'm not Jay—but I'm not Jason, either—"

I could remember my entire life, but the focus had shifted. I still felt the old love, the old nostalgia for the trailmen; but I also knew, with a sure sense of identity, that I was Doctor Jason Allison, Jr., who had abandoned mountain climbing and become a specialist in Darkovan parasitology. Not Jay who had rejected his world; not Jason who had been rejected by it. But then who?

Regis said quietly, "I've seen you before—once. When you knelt to the Old One of the trailmen." With a whimsical smile he said, "As an ignorant superstitious Darkovan, I'd say that you were a man who'd balanced his god and daemon for once."

I looked helplessly at the young Hastur. A few seconds ago my hands had been at his throat. Jay or Jason, maddened by self-hate and jealousy, could disclaim responsibility for the other's acts.

I couldn't.

Regis said, "We could take the easy way out, and arrange it so

we'd never have to see each other again. Or we could do it the hard way." He extended his hand, and after a minute, I understood, and we shook hands briefly, like strangers who have just met. He added, "Your work with the trailmen is finished, but We Hasturs committed ourselves to teach some of the Terrans our science—matrix mechanics. Dr. Allison—Jason—you know Darkover, and I think we could work with you. Further, you know something about slipping mental gears. I meant to ask; would you care to be one of them? You'd be ideal."

I looked out the window at the distant mountains. This work—this would be something which would satisfy both halves of myself. The irresistible force, the immovable object—and no ghosts wandering in my brain. "I'll do it," I told Regis. And then, deliberately, I turned my back on him and went up to the quarters, now deserted, which we had readied for the trailmen. With my new doubled—or com-

plete—memories, another ghost had roused up in my brain, and I remembered a woman who had appeared vaguely in Jay Allison's orbit, unnoticed, working with the trailmen, tolerated because she could speak their language. I opened the door, searched briefly through the rooms, and shouted, "Kyla!" and she came. Running. Disheveled. Mine.

At the last moment, she drew back a little from my arms and whispered, "You're Jason—but you're something more. Different . . ."

"I don't know who I am," I said quietly, "but I'm me. Maybe for the first time. Want to help me find out just who that is?"

I put my arm around her, trying to find a path between memory and tomorrow. All my life, I had walked a strange road toward an unknown horizon. Now, reaching my horizon, I found it marked only the rim of an unknown country.

Kyla and I would explore it together.

THE END

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MOON GLOW

(Continued from page 67)

individually. He took a deep breath and his cheeks puffed up as he let it out slowly. "Well, I guess you'd better know now."

Robb frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Farnsworth and I separated after we got about four miles from the ship. I thought I saw something that looked like a cave. I figured I might find something interesting there to take back with me. So I told Farnsworth I'd keep radio contact with him and off I went."

"Did you find a cave?" Robb wanted to know.

"No, it was just a big indentation in the wall of the crater. I threw some light on it and found it to be ten or fifteen feet deep." He paused as though not sure of what to say next.

"So?"

"So that's where I found my souvenir."

"Well, let's see it!" said Anderson.

Hamston opened his leather bag. The object he removed rendered the crew weak in the knees. He said, "We can have that drink, Anderson, but I don't think we'll enjoy it."

He poured them each a shot from a half-filled bottle of Vodka.

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WORLD BEYOND PLUTO

(Continued from page 49)

will. Then he smiled, and began to laugh. Jane thought he was hysterical with pain. But he said: "We're a pair of bright ones. The scout-ship."

Inside, it was very small. They had to lie very close to each other, but they made it. They reached *Mozart's Lady*.

Mayhem didn't wait to say good-bye. With what strength remained to him, he almost flung the girl from the scout-ship. The pain in his shoulder was very bad, but that wasn't what worried him. What worried him was the roaring in his ears, the vertigo, the mental confusion as his *elan* drifted, its thirty days up, toward death.

He saw the girl enter *Mozart's Lady*. He blasted off, and when the space-bound coffin pierced Pluto's heavyside layer, he called the Hub.

The voice answered him as if it were mere miles away, and not halfway across a galaxy: "Good Lord, man. You had us worried! You have about ten seconds. Ten seconds more and you would have been dead."

Mayhem was too tired to care. Then he felt a wrenching pain, and all at once his *elan* floated, serene, peaceful, in limbo. He had been plucked from the dying body barely in time, to fight mankind's lone battle against the stars again, wherever he was needed . . . out beyond Pluto.

Forever? It wasn't impossible.

THE END

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